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PPLEMENTARY ISSUE, NO. 3

HOPE FOR THE KINGDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORLD

The 1993 Frederick Neumann Symposium
on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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Because the policy of the Bulletin is to publish lectures and sermons by Princeton Seminary faculty and administration, and presentations by guests on the Seminary campus, we do not accept unsolicited material.

This supplementary issue of the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* contains the papers presented at the fifth Frederick Neumann Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture held at Princeton Theological Seminary, September 30–October 3, 1993. Eight prominent biblical scholars, theologians, and church historians address the theme of the Symposium: "Hope for the Kingdom and Responsibility for the World." Their reflections on the relation of Christian hope and Christian ethics are both fresh and illuminating.

Michael Welker contends that just as the New Testament resurrection narratives are characterized by a tension between the palpability and the mystery of the resurrected Christ, so the three primary texts of the Symposium—Mark 13, Romans 8, and Revelation 20-21—speak of palpable realities, yet do so in a way that "bursts the boundaries of our conceptions of reality and of world." Such texts extend the resurrection hope of Christians to the renewal and transformation of all of God's creation.

Paul D. Hanson finds a faith and a hope in Second Isaiah that speak to the confusion and fragmentation of our time. According to Hanson, the prophet "blends historical realism with eschatological audacity." His message juxtaposes the call to forget with the call to remember, and is therefore far from simplistic. Second Isaiah's call to faithfulness *and* openness cultivates a capacity "to forget pet theological traditions that give comfort by narrowing vision to the familiar, that bolster a weak identity by tying God's favor exclusively to one's immediate community."

J. Christiaan Beker focuses on Romans 8. Calling attention to a basic shift from present triumph to future hope in verse 17c, Beker emphasizes that Paul reminds Christians "that they are still an integral part of the unredeemed creation and will be so until the day of God's final deliverance." In Beker's judgment, Paul's "insistence on the interwovenness of human reality with the stuff of the created world cannot fail to enrich the relevance of the gospel for our world."

Brian K. Blount gives careful attention to Mark 13. Disagreeing with those who dismiss such apocalyptic texts as ethically irrelevant, Blount contends that Mark's intention was "to use apocalyptic imagery to heighten urgency in the eschatological task of preaching the kingdom of God." Preaching the kingdom "is not revolutionary waiting; it is revolutionary engagement."

M. Eugene Boring examines the images of the end in the Book of Revelation and especially John's picture of the New Jerusalem. Boring's conclusion is that these images do not depict closure as does the author of 4 Ezra and many other ancient and modern apocalyptists. The hope pictures of Revelation function instead "as a call to ethical responsibility and care for the world."

Gerald Bonner contrasts Augustine's eschatological orientation to the this-worldliness of modernity. While recognizing some value in the present world, Augustine's primary concern was not for an increase of temporary well-being but for the enlarging of the church as a pilgrim people on their way to life eternal with God. "Augustine would certainly have agreed that human physical suffering should, as far as possible, be relieved; but he would have felt it far more urgent to satisfy the spiritual hunger of humanity with the living bread that came down from heaven."

James Moorhead tracks the efforts at kingdom building in American Protestantism from 1880 to 1920. Noting the irony that those who sought to sacralize society contributed to its secularization, Moorhead contends that the pragmatism of the kingdom-building theology failed to provide a transcendent standard by which the church's programs and processes might be measured.

Ted Peters explores the place of eschatological sanctions in Christian ethics. While eschatological sanctions appear at first to be strictly extrinsic and selfish in character, Peters shows that the eschatological promise of the gospel can retain its futurity and its concern for the redemption of this world if the concept of prolepsis is employed. Grounded in grace, the Christian life is properly understood as a proleptic participation in God's new creation that "seeks to realize tomorrow's reality today."

For the occasion that brought these scholars together, the faculty, administration, alumni/ae, and friends of Princeton Theological Seminary express their thanks and indebtedness to Dr. Edith Neumann whose lively interest and great generosity help make possible the biennial Frederick Neumann Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture.

Daniel L. Migliore

Resurrection and the Reign of God*

by Michael Welker

Michael Welker is Professor of Systematic Theology at Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, Heidelberg, Germany. His most recent book is God the Spirit.

The fifth Frederick Neumann Symposium has for its theme "Hope for the Kingdom and Responsibility for the World." We are thus obliged to explore once again a nexus of issues that has already been considered many times over, and in a variety of forms. But in asking anew: What is the connection between hope for the reign of God and responsibility for this world? we are supposed to take our orientation primarily from Mark 13, Romans 8, and Revelation 20 and 21. That is the hitch. Or should we say, that is the particular challenge?

Precisely the given texts make it very difficult to connect the events depicted in them with perspectives that can be brought to bear in a way that is convincing and provides orientation in our world. All three texts focus on something beyond all experience: the rocking of the powers of heaven and the coming of the Human One in clouds with great power and glory (Mark 13); the revelation of the children of God, which goes hand in hand with the redemption of their bodies (Romans 8); the new heavens and the new earth, the New Jerusalem, which is illumined only by the glory of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 20-21).

What does the concentration on this "beyond" of all experience have to do with responsibility for the world? Indeed, how can these texts even be brought into relation with the hope for God's reign? Jesus' statements and parables insist that God's reign is already coming. They insist that, although God's reign may be hidden to many, although it may be present only in an emergent manner, it is *present*, like salt, light, leaven, and good seed.[1] Does Jesus perhaps lead us astray in saying that? Should this hope-bearing proclamation of a reign that is already coming be given up in favor of a purely future reality that relates to this world only in negation and annihilation? How can we bring our theme and our texts together? It looks as if we are invited to attempt a theological squaring of the circle.

The task posed by this Symposium also confronts us with, in the words of Daniel Migliore, a "theological vacuum that is now being filled by funda-

* I am very grateful for helpful comments on this paper by Daniel L. Migliore and Klaus Berger.

[1] See Michael Welker, "The 'Reign' of God," *Theology Today* 49 (January 1993) 500-515.

mentalistic apocalypticism." Migliore has traced this vacuum back to "the failure of the dominant theologies in North America [and, I would add, in Europe], too domesticated and too complacent to take seriously the disturbing eschatological themes of the Bible."[2] How can we take seriously the "disturbing eschatological themes" of Mark 13, Romans 8, and Revelation 20 and 21? How can we do this without abandoning hope for the reign of God and without losing sight of responsibility for the world?

The response I would like to contribute in the following discussion proceeds from yet another "disturbing eschatological theme": the resurrection. Taking as my point of departure the accounts of Jesus' resurrection, I want to attempt to elucidate and to understand the reality that ties together realistic hope for God's reign and the eschatological perspectives on a radical transformation of the world.

I. The Resurrection as Palpable Reality and as Appearance

How can we comprehend God's eschatological action and God's eschatological self-demonstration? How can we understand the power that is at work in the coming reign of God? The answer of many classical theologies is that we must stick to the revelation of God in the crucified and risen Christ.[3] Yet God's demonstration of power in the resurrection of the crucified Christ likewise confronts the search for theological understanding with major difficulties. Under the conditions of the current consciousness of reality, these difficulties seem to be simply insuperable. For we are confronted with the *particular bodiliness of the resurrected Christ.* Does not this confrontation bring understanding to the end of its rope?

The bodiliness of the risen Christ cannot consist in the crucified Jesus simply being revivified, simply coming back to life. The witnesses to the resurrection are concerned to highlight the palpability of the presence of the risen Christ. Yet, remarkably, they also emphasize that the resurrection has the *character of appearance.* Why? How are we to understand the reality of the risen, crucified Jesus Christ? Why is this reality evidently not exhausted either in a revivified fleshly existence or in mere conceptions, testimonies, and visions of human beings in the time from the return of the disciples to Galilee until Jesus' appearance to Paul—approximately three years after Jesus' death?

[2] Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992) 235.

[3] See, e.g., Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) 84-94, 139-229.

Wolfhart Pannenberg's formulation in the second volume of his *Systematic Theology* is on the mark:

> The resurrection of Jesus was thus not a return into this earthly life, but a transition into the new, eschatological life. He is the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20), the "firstborn within a large family" (Rom. 8:29), the "firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5), the "author of life" (Acts 3:15).[4]

Yet seen under this aspect—that what is at hand here is a transition into the new, eschatological life—how is the *facticity* of the resurrection event to be judged?[5] What genuineness and dependability are we to attribute to the witnesses to the resurrection? How does this reality relate to the reality of our experience? What is the connection between the witness borne to the resurrection of the crucified Jesus and the resurrection of the witnesses?

In order to comprehend whether and how God's eschatological action exercises an effect *through the resurrection* in the reality of our lives, according to the biblical texts we must wrestle with the difficult interconnection between the reality and the appearance of the risen Christ. In doing so we must abandon the simplistic, reductive conceptions of reality that have obscured the resurrection.

The accounts of the risen Jesus Christ are consciously and emphatically *accounts of Christ's appearance.* They are consciously and emphatically accounts of the risen Christ's coming on the scene in a way that is scarcely believable and highly improbable, and that remains dubious on the grounds of all other experience. They are consciously and emphatically accounts that continually raise the questions of truth and certainty. Clearly they consciously and emphatically provoke again and again the question: Were those persons who perceived the risen Christ caught up in mere notions, and fantastic notions at that?[6] The accounts of the resurrection provoke

[4] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie,* 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988-93) 2.390. All translations from works in German are the author's.

[5] John P. Galvin discusses the aporias in his essay, "Jesus Christ," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives,* ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 1.297-301.

[6] For critical engagement with the so-called subjective-vision hypothesis, see Ulrich Wilckens, "Die Überlieferungsgeschichte der Auferstehung Jesu," in *Die Bedeutung der Auferstehungsbotschaft für den Glauben an Jesus Christus,* ed. Fritz C. Viering (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1966) 51. Concerning the supposition that what was involved was an objective, intersubjectively coordinated vision, a "psychic chain reaction," see Bertold Klappert, *Diskussion um Kreuz und Auferstehung,* 5th ed. (Wuppertal: Aussaat Verlag, 1981) 12. Klappert is picking up on Hans Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte,* 3d ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964).

such questions, although at the same time they counteract the suspicion of illusion by highlighting the palpable contact with the risen Christ. Evidently they very consciously maintain the tension between, on the one hand, the suspicion of illusion and, on the other hand, the invalidation of that suspicion.

Matthew 28:9 says that the women who came to the grave took hold of the feet of the risen Christ. The women are running from the empty tomb in fear and great joy in order to announce to the disciples the message of the angel. When Jesus meets them, they fall down and take hold of his feet.

Luke 24:30 records that Jesus lies at table with the Emmaus disciples and breaks bread with and for them. Luke 24:39 and John 20:27 report Jesus' invitation to the disciples to touch him, and his invitation to Thomas to touch his wounds. Luke 24:41-43 even says, "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence."

It is astounding that in spite of this emphasis upon the fact that the presence of the risen Christ is palpable in the extreme (touching, breaking bread, eating), the Synoptic writers and John give many indications that the risen Christ is and remains an appearance. There is not a single place where the accounts of the risen Jesus Christ support the impression that the risen Christ lived again with his disciples or with other human beings in a real and continuous manner, that the risen Christ continued his pre-Easter life with them. Not a single text suggests the claim that the risen Christ lived with his fellow human beings in precisely the same way as did Jesus of Nazareth before his crucifixion.

In Mark 16:12 we find the significant expression, "he appeared in another form." Mark 16:14 speaks of an appearance to the eleven disciples lying at table. The text emphasizes the surprising and unmediated quality of this event. Mark 16:11 and 16:13 are right in line with this emphasis upon improbability when they explicitly repeat that the first witnesses to the presence of the risen Christ did not believe.

Admittedly, Matthew 18:17 records that the disciples who saw the risen Christ fell to their knees before him. But then the text says, "But some doubted." Klaus Berger has provided a convincing commentary on this verse:

> It is striking that the doubt *follows* the act of falling to their knees (contrary to, say, Lk. 24:37, 52!). Previous interpreters have not given

attention to this remarkable circumstance. Its explanation is that the act of falling to the knees plays a particular role in appearances. According to a well-established tradition . . . it is a characteristic of God's messenger to renounce this act of people falling on their knees and to refuse to accept it. Satan strives to have people fall on their knees, although this act is not appropriate before Satan (Mt. 4:9). The acceptance, without a word of objection, of people's falling to their knees is thus an occasion for doubt. The content of the doubt is . . . the alternative between "divine messenger" and "evil spirit." We can see from the texts of the tradition that the only case in which the act of falling to the knees need not be refused is when the one who is addressed can rightly lay claim to the title "*Dominus*" or "*Kyrios*," and does not reject this title. When Jesus accepts the disciples' act of falling to their knees before him, he thus is either *Kyrios* or Satan.[7]

Still more revealing is the way in which Luke records this tension between, on the one hand, palpable recognition and, on the other hand, an appearance accompanied by doubt, indeed even by dread. Luke 24:16 initially says of the Emmaus disciples, whom Jesus joins and with whom he travels on their way, that "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." Then—highlighting in the most dramatic way of all the simultaneous recognition *and* withdrawal of the resurrected Christ—Luke 24:31 reports that after Jesus broke bread the disciples' eyes were indeed opened and they recognized him. But in their very act of recognizing Jesus "he vanished from their sight." When the Emmaus disciples tell the other disciples about their experience, the next appearance occurs. Luke 24:36-37 reports: "Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost." Here, too, the risen Christ's act of making himself palpably present is accompanied by doubt in Christ's real presence.

If anything, John underlines the appearance character of the risen Christ still more strongly than do the Synoptic writers. According to John 20:17, when Mary Magdalene recognizes the risen Christ, he addresses her with the words, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father." John 20:19 and 26 emphasize that Jesus comes and stands among the disciples "when the doors were shut." In a drastic way the text counter-

[7] Klaus Berger, *Die Auferstehung des Propheten und die Erhöhung des Menschensohnes: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Deutung des Geschickes Jesu in frühchristlichen Texten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976) 162-163.

acts the impression that the old fleshliness has been restored, that here a life is being continued that was merely interrupted, that the resurrection is simply a reentry into the life lived before death.

It is very important to the texts to emphasize that the presence of the risen Christ has a palpable quality, that Christ is truly and bodily risen. Yet it is equally undeniable that at the same time they insist that what is at issue are *appearances*, burdened with all the problems of certainty that accompany an appearance, since it can be confused with mere notions, imagined experiences, and fantasies.

If we want to attempt to understand what is going on in the resurrection and in God's eschatological action, it is essential that we preserve and endure this tension. The witnesses to the resurrection evidently want to describe an event that exhibits features of that which is natural, palpable, and empirical, but that is not exhausted by that which is natural, palpable, and empirical. They want to describe an event that, for good and indispensable reasons, is broader and more complex than physical reality. The risen Christ is encountered in various appearances, comes and stands immediately among the disciples even when the doors are shut. Yet the risen Christ stands in a relation of identity with his natural, earthly, physical existence. The risen Christ appears and then vanishes like an angel. But unlike an angel, the risen Christ stands in a relation of identity with a natural and historical existence. The risen Christ has gone through a real human life and bears its features on himself in an enduring way.[8]

What is at issue is an appearance that we can say is "grounded in reality." At the same time the life of the risen Christ is now lived in self-revelation to other human beings. That life is carried out in comforting them, in strengthening them, and in sending them forth. What is at issue is thus an appearance that we can say "grounds reality," because the appearance brings itself to bear as the strengthening, gathering, commissioning, calling, and sending of human beings.

The recognition that the risen Christ on earth is an appearance is of great importance for many reasons. The fear is totally unfounded that seeing the risen Christ in this way would not do justice to the historicity, the reality, and the power of the resurrection and of the message of the resurrection. The opposite is the case. Not merely for the sake of being true

[8] I show elsewhere that the angels must be appearances in order not to mask the fullness of God's glory, and that they are more like cultural than natural creatures ("Angels in the Bible: A Grand Logic and the Big Problem of Their Hypercomplex Reality," *Theology Today* [forthcoming]).

to experience and for the sake of intellectual honesty, not only for the sake of agreement with the biblical witnesses, but for the sake of the *subject matter* it is essential to recognize and to insist that on earth the risen Christ is an appearance. Only in that way does a clear understanding of two fundamental matters become possible.

II. The Resurrection and Attestation of the Exalted Christ

The risen Christ is necessarily perceived on earth as an appearance because he belongs to and creates a reality that is richer and more complex than natural earthly reality. In comparison with the reality that the risen Christ creates and to which he belongs, earthly life represents a reduction. Inasmuch as the risen Christ makes himself present or is made present as an appearance, he is not bound to one spatial location at a time and to the conditions of natural earthly existence. Mark says that the risen Christ reveals himself in different forms. The risen Christ comes and stands among the disciples whether the doors are shut or not. Inasmuch as the risen Christ is remembered and made present with his scars and the marks of the nails, inasmuch as the risen Christ is now clearly seen in the connection between the resurrection and his advance announcements of his passion, inasmuch as the risen Christ thus appears in light of the messianic promises, the risen Christ's identity asserts itself against arbitrary distortions and obstructions. In the risen Christ's appearing, a definite space of memory and expectation is opened in which the risen Christ can be recognized in an appropriate and truly living way. As with angels, the risen Christ's appearing and vanishing brings to expression the fact that every merely palpable perception would be inadequate to this complex reality.

The notion of the exaltation of the risen Christ clarifies the positive side of what is expressed in an apparently negative way by the risen Christ's appearance. On the basis of a one-sidedly naturalistic understanding of heaven, the exaltation of Christ and the complex reality connected with it have often been incorrectly understood.[9] The exaltation of Christ expresses the fact that Christ enters into a domain in which are gathered and held copresent those natural and social powers that we experience under earthly

[9] In various places I have engaged in a critical analysis of this one-sidedly naturalistic understanding. See my *Universalität Gottes und Relativität der Welt: Theologische Kosmologie im Dialog mit dem amerikanischen Prozessdenken nach Whitehead*, 2d ed. (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988); "Himmel," *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch et al., 3d ed., 4 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986–) 2.519-522; and *Gottes Geist: Theologie des Heiligen Geistes*, 2d ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993) 132ff. (English translation: *God the Spirit* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, forthcoming]).

conditions only in an isolated, point-by-point, reductive manner. Heaven overarches all our worlds of experience, our more or less extended conceptions of the world and of reality. Heaven holds both past and future times and cultures. It is that domain of reality that is relatively inaccessible to us, that we certainly cannot manipulate, but that decisively defines life on this earth. According to the conviction of the biblical traditions, powers of nature, powers of social spheres, powers of history, powers of the past and of the future are gathered in heaven. The risen Christ is taken into this reality and thus is no longer subject to the limitations and boundaries, the one-sidednesses and frailties of a specific, relative world, a specific time, and a specific culture.

Here we are dealing with an understanding of reality that is hypercomplex for us, but is neither nonsensical nor fantastic. We render this understanding of reality thematically in the doxologies: "... as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end." Or in the words of Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Realities that are measurable only in natural terms do not attain the scope and power made known in the appearance of the risen Christ. But this power is reflected by events that have become "historical" in the strict sense.[10] The resurrection is a historical event. This means that the resurrection is an event that, without giving up its connection to the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, influences a diversity of realities, providing orientation, causing change, moving reality, intensifying reality, interweaving reality. We have before us not only a promise, but a powerful fulfillment; not only a basis for hope, but a reason for faith; not only a reference to an open future, but to a fulfilled past and present.

Yet the emphasis on the appearance of the risen Christ not only respects the fact that the earthly perceptions of heavenly reality cannot exhaust the latter. It also expresses the fact that human beings, the witnesses, have *an essential part in this event.* An appearance is essentially a "being for others." The appearance is not self-possessed. It is not self-sufficient. The perspectives on it—the fact that it is perceived and the way in which it is perceived—help to constitute it. Thus doubt and uncertainty always accompany and surround appearances. We must not suppress this fact even with

[10] On the difference between "historical" events and those that are measurable *only* in empirical terms, see my critical analysis of Wilfred Cantwell Smith: " '*Unity of Religious History*' and '*Universal Self-Consciousness*': Leading Concepts or Mere Horizons on the Way *Towards a World Theology?*" *Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988) 431-444.

regard to the risen Christ. In any case, the Gospels do not suppress this problem. They confront us with it at length. The fact that the witnesses help to constitute the appearance, the fact that the risen Christ appears essentially "for them" and not for himself, self-possessed and self-absorbed, this fact does not mean that the testimonies to the resurrection rest on arbitrary conceptions or bare illusions. The testimonies refer to the past and to the promised reality of Jesus of Nazareth, which becomes present reality in a new way for the witnesses.

The resurrection appearances link up with real, palpable experience and give rise to real, palpable experience. They engage us more deeply and more powerfully than merely natural events can affect and engage us.[11] This palpable change in human beings who are confronted with the appearance of the risen Christ is documented by the fact that the risen Christ calls, commissions, and sends. In this extremely concrete, disputed, and disputable way, "God's being is in coming," to use a formulation much beloved in recent German-language theology.[12] At the same time the resurrection appearances qua appearances compel an understanding that the Reformers tried to drive home: there is no Jesus Christ without the people of Jesus Christ. There is no Jesus Christ without the witnesses of Jesus Christ.[13] The outpouring of the Spirit and the edification of Christ's body increase this inclusion and involvement of human beings in Christ's presence after Easter.

The reality of the resurrection—a reality that manifests itself in appearance, in testimony, and in proclamation in the power of the Spirit—is continually endangered on the basis of its ties to the witnesses, that is, to the members of Christ's body. Yet inasmuch as it simultaneously enters into numerous contexts in time and space, it is extremely powerful. The pres-

[11] We give expression to this in the celebration of the Lord's supper. There are many reasons to think that, on the basis of the insights developed in this paper, we will be able to understand better the particular "realism" of that sacrament.

[12] Above all in the work of Eberhard Jüngel; see, e.g., *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt: Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1977) 566: "God's heing is in coming"; "God's being remains in coming"; etc. Despite his effort to develop the theology of the Trinity and the theology of the cross in strict relationship with one another, Jüngel is continually in danger of having his theology issue in metaphysical speculations à la Hegel concerning a complex self-relation of God.

[13] This insight also acquires increasing importance in the later Barth. In his *Church Dogmatics* (4 vols. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1962] IV/1, esp. pp. 353-357 and IV/3.326ff.), Barth holds with systematic consistency to the point that "Christ would not be Christ without Christ's own people (in the narrower and wider senses of the term), that there cannot, therefore, be an exclusive but only an *inclusive* Christology which *encompasses* the existence of human beings hoth negatively and positively" (*Church Dogmatics*, IV/1.354 [translation altered]).

ence of the risen Christ connects structural patterns of life and experience that are separated in time and space. This broad reality, this reality that overarches the domain of individual or shared possible experience, is grasped by faith. Faith relates to a reality that does not merely enter into and exercise an effect in *one* domain of knowledge and experience.

It becomes possible to recognize the significance and the seriousness of this community of the witnesses to the risen Christ as soon as we see that Christ's resurrection represents *God's engagement with the event of the cross.* The witnesses to the resurrection and the members of Christ's body are taken into and implicated in a process in which God engages the conspiracy of human beings against life.

This conspiracy is very complex. It employs all available means of power in order to silence and to bring about the disappearance of the one who proclaimed God's coming reign and brought very concrete deliverance from sickness and need to many human beings—deliverance that could be palpably experienced. In the name of religion, in the name of Jewish and Roman laws, in the name of the dominant politics and the public opinion of the moment, Jesus of Nazareth is nailed to the cross. The powers that are supposed to serve to maintain a life that is good—pleasing to God and beneficent to human beings—here, being misused, collaborate against the bearer of the power of life.[14] God's eschatological action not only uncovers this conspiracy. It not only sentences this conspiracy to ineffectiveness. It compels this conspiracy, against this conspiracy's own intentions, to work towards and serve the exaltation of Christ and the powerful coming of God's reign. The "will to distance from God" (Hans-Georg Geyer), which human beings seem to help triumph through the cross, is put to use by God to reveal the world's sin and lostness. Out of the apparently definitive absence of help and salvation, out of the abyss of despair and cynicism grows the power of the world's deliverance.

In the resurrection God engages the powers that, under the semblance of

[14] In a major article on "Problems of Jesus' Trial," Otto Betz has provided a differentiated exposition on this religious and political collaboration, while at the same time attempting to avoid moral denunciations on all sides. On the basis of Mt. 26:63 ("Then the high priest said to him, 'I put you under oath [*exorkizo*] before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."), Betz considers whether the priests may even have made an effort to save Jesus and to dissuade him from his messianic claim. Pilate, too, according to Betz merely stuck to the *lex Iulia de maiestate* (*Digesta* 48:4, 1): "According to that law the claim to be king was condemned as a crime deserving death, insofar as it . . . caused rebellion" ("Probleme des Prozesses Jesu," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II.25.1, ed. Wolfgang Haase [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982] 565-647, quotation from p. 643). In developing this line of thought Betz is picking up on Haim H. Cohn, *Reflections on the Trial and Death of Jesus* (Jerusalem: Israel Law Review Association, 1967).

protecting and helping us, both knowingly and unknowingly lead us to destruction. What is at issue is nothing less than God's great engagement with sin. The witnesses to the resurrection and the members of Christ's body are deemed worthy to participate in this engagement. In the power of the Spirit they enter into the engagement with destructive, sinful misuse of the law in order that, as Romans 8 says, "the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk . . . according to the Spirit."

In the power of the Spirit the community of the witnesses to the resurrection is set in creative motion. The talk of the pouring out of the Spirit graphically describes this community out of all countries, cultures, and languages. It describes a community in which men and women, old and young, rulers and ruled mediate prophetic knowledge of God and realize righteousness and mercy both with each other and for each other.[15] On the one hand, this life in the Spirit is continually engaged with the powers that execute the will to distance from God, to unrighteousness, and to lack of mercy. On the other hand, this life in the Spirit lives in the certainty of having a share in the power "from on high." It thus lives in the certainty formulated by Romans 8:36b-39 in the following manner:

> "For your sake we are being killed all day long;
> we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."
>
> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

III. The Message of the "Disturbing Texts" of Mark 13, Romans 8, and Revelation 20-21

But when and where does a *universally obvious experience* correspond to this certainty of faith? When and where does this certainty of life in the Spirit—the certainty of life in the community of testimony with the risen and exalted Christ—when and where does this certainty become a universally obvious truth?

Our three "disturbing" eschatological texts respond to this question. Having elucidated the background of the community of the resurrection, we can, I think, understand why the response that these texts give must be troubling and dismaying. They must envision a situation in which the truth

[15] For greater detail, see Welker, *God the Spirit*, pts. 2.4 and 4.1.

of the resurrection becomes manifest to all witnesses: nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God. In an unimaginable universality it is to become manifest that the witnesses, those who live in the Spirit, the children of God, live a true life that overcomes death, as the crucified Christ overcame it in the resurrection. This true life is not yet grasped in its fullness when we know that we are secure and protected in the community of the church. It is not yet grasped in its fullness when we understand ourselves as members of an earthly community of testimony that permeates the world and transforms it with God's good gifts. The earthly chain of communities of witnesses will one day break off, just as Lazarus had to die again.[16]

What happens when that which is valid and enduring, that which has overcome and overcomes death, is lifted up out of this community of witnesses with the risen Christ? The answer is that we are then compelled to develop a new understanding of reality and a new understanding of time—an understanding that bursts the boundaries of the mere universality of this world. We must hold simultaneously present the resurrection community of all times and regions of the world, the true and creative life of all times and of all regions of the world. But to do this bursts the boundaries of our conceptions of reality and of world. In the power of the Spirit we can imagine the presence of the risen Christ on earth. But we cannot grasp the fullness of the reality of the exalted Christ, the exalted Christ's obvious presence with all witnesses, without at the same time focusing on the end of this world.

Our three texts do precisely that, from three different perspectives. Romans 8 talks about the hope that with the redemption of our bodies we will be manifest as children of God, and creation will be liberated from the pains of transitoriness (Rom. 8:19-25). The revelation of the true life that is at work in the testimony to the resurrection, in the activity of the Spirit, in the engagement with sin on behalf of true knowledge of God, true righteousness, and mercy—the unbounded revelation of this life dissolves the boundaries of finitude and of transitoriness.

Mark 13 describes this process primarily concentrated not on those who believe, but on the unbounded revelation of the exalted Christ. Only by removing earthly reality can the Human One, the representative of the

[16] See the excellent article by the philosopher Konrad Cramer, "Über Leben und Glauben, Zeit und Tod: Philosophische Überlegungen zur christlichen Religion," in *Gott im Selbstbewusstsein der Moderne: Zum neuzeitlichen Begriff der Religion*, ed. Ulrich Barth and Wilhelm Gräb (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1993) 129-139.

human species in the fullness of heavenly reality, enter into earthly relations with all the people of the Human One. That removal of earthly reality must be experienced as a catastrophe of cosmic proportions, as a dramatic sharpening of conflicts with a world that wants to cling to itself and to its finite constitution. For that reason human beings—thoroughly despairing—will attempt to pin the Messiah down to that which is finite: "And if anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There he is!'—do not believe it" (Mk. 13:21). In contrast to every fixed concentration on that which is finite, the Human One will gather all the elect of all times and worlds. The Human One will gather the elect not only from one end of the earth to the other, but, as the text says, "from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" (Mk. 13:27).

The Apocalypse describes this process in an orientation that we can term "historico-cosmological." Earth and heaven flee from God's presence (Rev. 20:11). The sea gives up the dead that are in it, and death and the underworld give up the dead that are in them (Rev. 20:13). Here again we have before us images of a gathering of human beings from the fullness of times. Such a gathering must go hand in hand with the removal of all familiar earthly conditions of existence. This reality is filled with the glory of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 21:23; cf. 21:9-11). It can no longer be described except in symbolic transformations of our notions of reality.

Are these three texts only terrifying and discouraging? Do they ultimately communicate the message that whoever wants to achieve, under the conditions of the finite, a definitive awareness of the unbounded fullness of God's glory, must not be surprised when what is finite collapses in the process? Or do these texts paint images of revenge and recompense that stir up the flames of the escapist hope that one day the witnesses to the resurrection will be definitively lifted out of this miserable world?

In my opinion these texts attempt to enunciate the hope ignited by Jesus' overcoming of the world, the hope ignited by Jesus' suffering, Jesus' dying on the cross, and Jesus' resurrection. These texts attempt to extend this hope to all overcoming of the world. In spite of all experiences of death and despair, they attempt to bear witness to the hope for all elected human beings to participate in the life of the resurrection. In a healing way they break through all egoism of the witnesses living at any particular time. They do this by also including in this community the times and the worlds before and after these witnesses. On the one hand, in so doing they give the comfort of including every death of witnesses to the resurrection. They provide a perspective that allows us to look back at our own deaths. On the

other hand, in so doing they compel us to focus on the end of this world. Comfort and terror cannot be separated here. Judgment and deliverance are intertwined. But this situation is thoroughly familiar to those who believe.

As witnesses to the resurrection and as members of Christ's body, those who believe come from the perspective of God's engagement with the destructive power of sin and of death. As witnesses to the resurrection and as members of Christ's body, they are enlisted in the service of this engagement. In this engagement they can acquire a certainty of community with the risen Christ, with the exalted Human One. They can acquire a consciousness of participating in the glory of the exalted Lamb. In this certainty and in this consciousness they can very calmly take cognizance of the apocalyptic histories and visions. The full revelation of the communion of saints "from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" is inconceivable without this earth and its heaven passing away. Whoever is already now taking part as a witness in the life of the risen Christ will need neither to long impatiently for this definitive revelation nor to fear it.

The witnesses to the resurrection and those who live in the Spirit of Christ are already living in the alertness of which Mark 13 speaks. They are living in the community of the Spirit—a community that, according to Romans 8, is inviolable. They are living in the light of the glory of the Lamb depicted by the Apocalypse. At the same time they are living in and among diverse trials, temptations, and threats. They are hounded not only by ridicule and cynicism, not only by the power of real godlessness and of diverse forms of unrighteousness, but also by the dangers of their own uncertainty, of their own capacity to be deceived, and of their own trials and temptations. Under the conditions of earthly existence, the resurrection is present only in this tension and can be experienced only in this tension. In that regard we have no advantage over the first witnesses—and they have none over us.

Second Isaiah's Eschatological Understanding of World Events

by Paul D. Hanson

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I have been chastened thoroughly by the recent events in the Middle East. This is an area of the world of which I supposedly have some knowledge. I have lived there for two years and visited other times. What is more, the confessional perspective that behooves me to be attentive to signs of God's redemptive purposes in the world should not exclude this one region, unless of course my faith is of the kind that flourishes only in relation to issues concerning which I remain ignorant. The sobering fact is that my position on Israeli-Arab relations, and especially on relations between Jews and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, has been consistent for thirty years, consistently pessimistic. Can animosities with roots reaching back through the centuries, fertilized by conflicting religious traditions and watered by repeated hostilities, be overcome in the name of peace? No. Impossible, my reasoning has claimed.

While I am in a penitent mood, permit me to go one step further. I am not normally a cynic concerning divine presence in human experience. In fact, trust in the activity of God's spirit in the world provides the basis for everything significant that I do. Consequently, I believe in miracles involving all aspects of human nature, spiritual, psychological, and physical, aspects intertwined in an intricate unity reflecting God's image. So how can I account for the difference between my attitude toward Middle Eastern politics and my attitude toward an ailing friend?

As I search for an answer to that question, I find myself further humbled by an apparent similarity between *my* concept of divine providence and that of certain conservative evangelicals who, during the previous major international breakthrough—the collapse of Communist hegemony in the former Soviet Union—searched for and found the explanation they desired in the fact that Gorbachev's mother was a Christian. Though open to evidence of divine redemptive activity in human history, do I too limit that possibility to cases where Christians are in control? Does my concept of divine providence function mainly to support a religious provincialism that

limits God's pool of candidates for agents of deliverance and reconciliation to members of my own religious confession?

Into the narrow sanctuary of such sectarian consciousness the message of Second Isaiah enters like a whirlwind:

> Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,
> whose right hand I have grasped
> to subdue nations before him
> and strip kings of their robes,
> to open doors before him—
> and the gates shall not be closed:
> I will go before you and level the mountains,
> I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
> and cut through the bars of iron,
> I will give you the treasures of darkness
> and riches hidden in secret places,
> so that you may know that it is I, the Lord,
> the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
> For the sake of my servant Jacob,
> and Israel my chosen,
> I call you by your name,
> I surname you, though you do not know me.
> I am the Lord, and there is no other;
> besides me there is no god.
> I arm you, though you do not know me,
> so that they may know, from the rising of the sun
> and from the west, that there is no one besides me;
> I am the Lord, and there is no other.
> I form light and create darkness,
> I make weal and create woe;
> I the Lord do all these things.
>
> (Isa. 45:1-7 [NRSV])

The international situation that Second Isaiah addressed with this so-called Cyrus Oracle was similar in important respects to the one we are now witnessing in our time. Peoples displaced from their homelands are crying out to the powerful nations and the U.N. for help in repatriation. Specifically in the Middle East, Palestinians are becoming increasingly articulate and effective in their demands for full restoration of self-rule.

In the mid-sixth century B.C.E., it was the Jewish community that had

lost its political autonomy and was forced to contemplate former homes now either occupied by strangers or reduced to ruins. At a time when growing cynicism had convinced many Jews that their exile would continue indefinitely while others persisted in prayer for a Davidic deliverer, Second Isaiah surprised both. He announced that God was about to return the exiles to their homeland, to rebuild their cities and their temple. But as the agent, God was appointing not a Davidide, not even a devotee of Yahweh, but a Zoroastrian who in connection with his successful campaign against Babylon had added Marduk to his objects of worship.

To some the Cyrus Oracle proclaimed by Second Isaiah must have sounded like blasphemy, to others like a reckless stratagem. Historical distance allows us to recognize in his thought the perceptiveness of a careful interpreter of international events. Comparison of Isaiah 44:24–45:7 with Cyrus' own description of his sweeping campaign in his famous cylinder inscription demonstrates the thoroughness with which Second Isaiah studied the major political happenings of his time. In this prophet we encounter a theological mind capable of combining historical realism with an audacious eschatological understanding of history. No narrow sectarian here, reporting God's appointment of a world conqueror to a saving task and then adding God's acknowledgment, "though you do not know me." The hypothesis advanced by some older critics that Second Isaiah believed that Cyrus would convert to Yahwism is motivated, I suspect, by the same mentality that needed to find a strain of Christian influence in the recent Russian reform by locating Gorbachev's Christian mother. That hypothesis blurs Second Isaiah's portrait of a God who directs the cosmos and all that is in it according to a divine plan. No sphere stands outside of the sovereignty of this God. No power can thwart God's redemptive purpose. Finally every king serves the King of Kings. Though Cyrus does not know it, his title and his power both stem from the only transcendent power in the universe.

At the same time, Second Isaiah's historical realism does not generate a reductionist theology. It rather contributes credibility to a daring eschatological faith. It relates God's universal plan to the specific details of human existence. It demonstrates that the God "who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in," is the same God who cares for individual peoples and even individual persons. It is for the sake of Israel, that is to say, to accomplish the return of the exiled community to their homeland, that God has called Cyrus.

Second Isaiah does not abandon the confessional content of his faith in an outburst of dreamy universalistic enthusiasm. But neither does he allow a narrowly parochial appropriation of traditional confessions to limit the extent of God's concern to that of his own people. The raison d'être of Israel transcends its own existence. As the first and second Servant Songs indicate, Israel was placed by God within the family of peoples for the purpose of the participation of all nations in the restoration of divine *shalom*. But the scope of God's purpose extends even further. As glorious as was the vision of salvation reaching the furthest corners of the earth, there was yet a more lofty purpose behind Israel's existence. That purpose is described as the Cyrus Oracle moves to its climax:

> so that they may know, from the rising of the sun
> and from the west, that there is no one besides me;
> I am the Lord, and there is no other.
>
> (45:6)

God, the universal creator, while not yet acknowledged by all as Lord, would, through the faithfulness of redeemed Israel, come to be so recognized. When that happened, the human family would be reunited so as to live in peace as God intended from the beginning. The prophet's announcement is daring, fully in the spirit of the divine word in 43:18-19:

> Do not remember the former things,
> or consider the things of old.
> I am about to do a new thing.

A Persian messiah! That surely is a new thing! But it is not a thought born of a reckless deconstruction of the lessons of the past. Second Isaiah's message is filled with polarities that safeguard against facile, arrogant disregard for the lessons of the past. One such polarity is created by a counterpoint to the above admonition not to remember:

> Remember this and consider,
> recall it to mind, you transgressors,
> remember the former things of old.
>
> (46:8-9)

"Remember"; "Do not remember." Remember God's promise to Abraham that he would become a blessing to all nations; do not remember the unconditional promises of an eternal Davidic dynasty that tied possibilities to a human institution.

Second Isaiah's universal vision thus does not undermine or supersede the confessional contents of Yahwistic faith, but rather arises as a natural extension of them. The perspective from which he studies world-shaping events is one refined by centuries of theological reflection. Specific world events, therefore, do not arise as disconnected outcroppings in a chaotic landscape, but as connected formations reflective of a consistent universal purpose. The historical-theological criteriology of Second Isaiah and its dialectical interplay between traditional confession and universal eschatological vision can be illustrated by reference to two of its aspects.

The first aspect involves his application of typology. Alongside traditions treating creation and Israel's ancestors, the exodus tradition enjoys a prominent place in Isaiah 40-55. The reason is clear. As a formative moment in the history of God's relation to the people Israel, it provides valuable insight into the divine purpose that directs all reality towards a final goal. The events of history are not arbitrary, but are episodes in the unfolding of God's plan. By way of clarifying that plan and God's faithfulness to its fulfillment, Second Isaiah can describe the imminent return of the exiles to their homeland as a second exodus. The God who, moved by compassion and righteousness, responded to the cry of oppressed slaves in Egypt and led them to freedom and an open future, could be trusted to deliver Jewish exiles, if they opened their hearts to God as had their ancestors. Second Isaiah's balanced description of the power and the mercy of the only true God gives force to his proclamation that every power in the universe was obliged, whether knowingly or not, to contribute to God's redemptive plan.

The dialectic between traditional confession and universal eschatological vision can be illustrated further by reference to the Servant Songs. The prophet, while applying the title "messiah" to Cyrus, withholds another title commonly attributed to royalty, namely, "servant." This is surely intentional. As messiah, the one anointed for special service, Cyrus has an important task, the political task of returning the exiled community to their land. But there is an even more important release required before salvation could reach "the ends of the earth." It was the release of the people Israel from its bondage to sin. It was the atonement that even *yom kippur* had proven incapable of accomplishing. While pressing the political vision of divine providence beyond any previous tradition, Second Isaiah simultaneously presses the spiritual vision of atonement beyond anything found earlier. This happens especially in the fourth Servant Song in 52:12–53:12, which, while building on priestly tradition concerning sacrifice, guides theological reflection to a new level. Not an unblemished animal, but the

righteous, innocent Servant of the Lord was the one chosen by God to accomplish the release of the community from spiritual bondage. Here we see that the step preparatory to the restoration of the entire human family involved the specific task of the spiritual restoration of one particular people:

> . . . he had done no violence,
> and there was no deceit in his mouth.
> Yet it was the will of the Lord
> to crush him with pain. . . .
> [to] make his life an offering for sin.
> (53:9b-10a)

The new thing that was being revealed through Second Isaiah thus deepened Israel's theological tradition on two interrelated levels, one concerning the redemption of Israel, the other the redemption of the nations. While drawing deeply on previous tradition, the prophet related motifs to one another in such a way as to give them a deeper meaning. For example, by taking the title messiah, a title that his listeners would have automatically applied to the Davidic king, and reapplying it to a Persian, and then introducing the title of servant, again one commonly referring to the king, but describing his mission in terms of an atoning sacrifice, Second Isaiah brought Israel's theological reflection to a new level of profundity.

Given the audacity of the prophet's proclamation on both levels, evidence of adverse reaction is not surprising. This explains, at least in part, the recurrence of the genres of the disputation and the trial speech in the Second Isaiah corpus. To Israel, the prophet says,

> Listen, you that are deaf;
> and you that are blind, look up and see!
> (42:18)

Not only Israel, but the leaders of the world are ill prepared for their encounter with the Servant called into God's service:

> So he shall startle many nations;
> kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
> for that which had not been told them they shall see,
> and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.
> (52:15)

Second Isaiah's proclamation is not a message for the timid. It is a call to forget pet theological traditions that give comfort by narrowing vision to

the familiar, that bolster a weak identity by tying God's favor exclusively to one's immediate community. In both of the cases we have glimpsed — the deepening of Israel's understanding of atonement and the widening of its eschatological understanding of world events — Second Isaiah guides the audience forward on the basis of a critical reading of tradition. The old and the new meet in a tempest of unprecedented reflection. This is the venue of revelation.

We share the Jewish exiles' experience in one important respect. Political change is breaking in upon us at a rate that startles many nations. We are tempted to run for shelter by appealing to the things of old. New theological thoughts are declared heresy. We are admonished to replicate the past. God will use the familiar agents to carry out the divine plan. We seek evidence of release, whether spiritual or political, where Christians are in charge.

Or we declare all of the religious traditions of the past bankrupt on the basis of their failure to achieve peace. We run to new forms of spirituality with an intolerance and condescension that match those of our dogmatic fundamentalist contemporaries.

Does Second Isaiah's message address this frightening situation of fragmentation and retribalization? Does the Christian church have resources in its biblical and confessional heritage to proclaim a word of hope relevant to a rapidly changing world? Does God's Word, even today, contain an element of surprise capable of capturing the attention of world leaders and influencing, in the direction of God's *shalom*, international events? Is there a contemporary equivalent to the phenomenon described by Second Isaiah when he announced:

> That which had not been told them they shall see,
> and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.
> (52:15)

To what are *we* called to contemplate by events today in the Middle East, in Bosnia, in Russia? Certainly not facile scenarios produced by mechanical translation of ancient biblical drama into modern dress. One of the clearest proofs against Hal Lindsay and his ilk, as if any more were necessary, is the handshake between Rabin and Arafat. The next revision of *Late, Great Planet Earth* will call for far more than a change of the date of Armageddon.

Second Isaiah, in blending historical realism with eschatological audacity and in juxtaposing the call to forget the past with the admonition to remember the things of old, invites us to a kind of political-theological reflection

that is anything but facile. But what are its qualities? Tentatively, let us suggest the following five:

1) Openness to the surprise of finding God's presence in unexpected places and of finding agents of God's will in unfamiliar guises. Especially in an age of resurgent militant fundamentalism in nearly all of the world religions, it is important to foster a critical faith that transcends nationalistic and sectarian self-interest disguised as divine intention. We must seek to describe a criteriology that allows us to recognize friends of peace and justice, however different they may be from us.

2) Historical realism that is attentive to the facts of the world in which we live. Faith is not an invitation to ignorance, but to attentiveness and responsibility. Religion is not a substitute for good political science and economics, but an incentive for both. Historical realism as an aspect of faith restrains fanaticism at the same time as it cultivates tenacity in the often tortuous path to peace. It welcomes breakthroughs such as the end of the cold war and the Camp David accord at the same time as it is prepared for inevitable setbacks as proponents of the old orders of special privilege and repression reassert their claims.

3) Openness to divine initiative in unexpected places combined with historical realism produces eschatological audacity, a responsible discernment of what Luther called the left hand of God guiding all nations of the world according to divine purpose. Eschatological audacity, by being inspired by trust in divine providence at the same time as being informed by historical realism, does not produce dogmatism, but courage and hope.

4) Faithfulness to the specific contents of our religious confessions. Our vision of God's redemptive purpose does not broaden at the cost of our particular beliefs, but on the basis of a purified critical understanding of them. It is from our faith heritage that we derive the sense of justice and mercy that opens our eyes to God's presence in new places. The biblical vision of the human race as God's family and of every individual as created in the image of God induces us to speak and act on behalf of universal peace and equality at times when nationalism and religious parochialism stigmatize such as unpatriotic and heretical. The traditions of the exodus and the second exodus still hold before us the God of justice and compassion who hears the cries of the oppressed and responds, through whom God chooses, to their need for deliverance and right to be free. When biblical faith is properly understood, there is absolutely no conflict between confession and universal vision. When we get our identity straight as a people redeemed by God by an atonement more precious than any earthly treasure and for a

purpose that acknowledges no limits, we regain the freedom to be God's Servant People on behalf of all victims of oppression and injustice.

5) Even Israel's role as Servant People was not its highest calling. Finally, Israel, together with all the nations, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the stars, and all heavenly beings, was restored to divinely intended wholeness for praise of the one true God. We shall reach the sublimest expression of our faith when we dare to envision the restoration of the unity of the human family and its harmony with all other creatures in worship. Here finally eschatological audacity and realistic humility will be bonded in joyous, self-giving love.

When tempted to reduce my vision of historical possibilities to old ways of thinking, I shall try to remember Second Isaiah. I shall try to keep clear the distinction between those things that I should remember and consider, and those that I should forget. I shall try to be faithful to the dynamic principles of my religious tradition that prepare me for seeing the new thing that springs forth in Gaza, in Los Angeles, in the life of a friend.

Vision of Hope for a Suffering World: Romans 8:17-30

by J. Christiaan Beker

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I. Preface

The theme of this Symposium, "Hope for the Kingdom and Responsibility for the World," fits the scope and intent of Romans 8 exceedingly well. Indeed, Romans 8 is in many ways the high point of this book, especially when we consider its climax in the victorious hymn of verses 31-39. However, in this lecture I will focus only on a section of the chapter, that is, verses 17-30, in order to highlight its exegetical and theological significance for our time.

Let me here set out the hermeneutical guidelines that I will apply. The word of scripture can only be a lively word, a word on target, when we realize that its central message must speak to us within the particularity of our diverse situations. Therefore, I suggest that the authority of scripture—in this case Romans 8—has a *catalytic function* for our time, one that denotes a generative hermeneutic. This means that even though the biblical text must undergo a necessary change in its transferral to our time, it is nonetheless unaltered in its substance. Thus a catalytic hermeneutic intends to remain faithful to the abiding and normative coherence of the gospel, but in such a way that it resists a literalistic or anachronistic transfer of the text, because it is aware that the various contingencies of biblical times are not identical to those of our time. In a similar way, a catalytic hermeneutic resists the kind of modernistic imposition on the text that would transform it into a means of confirming our own ideologies.

II. Romans 8 in the Context of the Letter

The argument of Romans is consistent and coherent because it is determined by an apocalyptic train of thought that climaxes in a theology of hope, hope in the sovereign manifestation of God's glory. Moreover, notwithstanding the systematic-coherent appearance of Romans, which on the surface seems to lack any clear contingent features, the coherent argument of the letter interacts regularly with Paul's contingent interpretation. The doxology of 15:13 constitutes, in my opinion, the climax and conclusion of the letter's argument: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace

in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." And so 15:13 forms the climax to the theme of 1:16-17, where the righteousness of God is defined as the power unto salvation to everyone who has faith.

The flow of the argument between 1:16-17 and 15:13 runs as follows: Romans 1:18–4:25 is primarily a dialogue with Jews, as demonstrated by the Jewish language world that Paul employs here (*dikaiosynē*, *pistis*, *erga nomou*, *Ioudaios*). The subject matter in this section is the impartiality and righteousness of God towards both Jew and Greek, but especially towards the Jew, whose judging and boasting are condemned and who is reminded that God's impartiality concerns both his impartial judgment of all people and his impartial gift of righteousness to all people. The argument has a sociological focus, which is the unity of Jew and Greek in the church.

However, in 5:1–8:39 a new vocabulary (*pneuma*, *agapē*, *elpis*, *doxa tou theou*, *zōē*, *katallagē*, *eirēnē*) and a new confessional style (first-person plural) show that the argument now moves to a new level. It elaborates the subject matter of the righteousness of God in Christ in a new key, as the lead sentence of 5:1-2 makes clear: the gift of God's righteousness now evolves into the hope of the apocalyptic glory of God.

In other words, the issue of the *unity* of Jew and Greek (1:18–4:25) is now expanded into *a cosmic frame* and ceases to be a specifically social one. The intramural discussion about the unity of the church becomes an extramural reflection on the relation of the church to the apocalyptic power structures that still rule an unredeemed world. Thus the issue of the power of sin that threatens the unity of the church becomes now the issue of the struggle between the apocalyptic powers of death and life in relation to the ultimate triumph of God.

Although chapters 9-11 seem abruptly appended to parts one (1:18–4:25) and two (5:1–8:39) of the letter, we must understand that the apocalyptic interpretation of the Christ event in its significance for the eschatological triumph of God involves not only 1) the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church (1:18–4:25), and 2) the hope in the glory of God (5:1–8:39), but also 3) the priority of Israel in God's salvation-historical plan, because the fullness of God's triumph over sin and death in his creation will not be actualized until Israel's protological election is validated in its eschatological destiny.

Since the need for brevity will not permit me to show the relation of chapters 12-15 (the most contingent chapters of Romans) to the coherent flow of the argument, it has become clear that the twin motifs of church

unity and apocalyptic glory constitute the coherent frame of Romans. Paul insists on the one church in the one gospel under the one triumphant God. Thus Paul reminds the Roman church (15:14-15) that its unity is due not only to God's gift of righteousness in Christ, but also constitutes its mandate in light of its apocalyptic destiny, since its unity and mission are the anticipation in the present age of God's final reign over a restored creation.

III. Disposition and Scope of Romans 8:17-30

A. Romans 8 constitutes the climax of part two of the letter (5:1–8:39). This is demonstrated not only by the hymn of victory in 8:31-39, but also by the fact that Romans 8 unfolds the motifs of 5:1-11. Both sections share a common vocabulary (love [*agapē*], the Spirit [*pneuma*], hope [*elpis*], and glory [*doxa*]). Moreover, Romans 5:1-5 introduces the issue of the relation of hope in the glory of God to suffering in the world—an issue that forms the theme of Romans 8:17-30.

Thus, after Paul has dismantled weighty Jewish objections to his views on the relation of sin and grace (chapter 6) and on that of sin and the law (chapter 7), chapter 8 not only marks the unfolding of the themes introduced in 5:1-11, but also describes the reversal of the lament of the person in bondage to the law, which Paul had sketched in 7:7-25 (especially 7:24).

Romans 8:1-17 is dominated by the antithetical opposition of the powers of the old and new ages. In sharp dualistic fashion Paul contrasts life in the flesh and life in the Spirit, concluding with the statement of verse 9: "But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you." The frequent occurrence in chapter 8 of the terms Spirit (twenty times) and flesh (thirteen times) is noteworthy, especially since in no other letter of Paul do these antithetical concepts have such a prominent place.

Although the emphasis in verses 1-17 is on the present status of Christians in the Spirit due to God's redemptive act in Christ (verse 3), the future eschatological thrust of Paul's thought is evident in verses 11 and 17, which prepare the way for verses 18-30.

B. Because of my focus on verses 17-30, I will describe in greater detail the scope and disposition of that section. The thesis is introduced in verse 17c: "... if, in fact, we suffer with him [Christ] so that we may also be glorified with him." Verse 18 then states the thesis: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." Paul elaborates and explains his thesis in three subsequent movements in verses 19-21, 22-25, and 26-27, and finally concludes the argument in verses 28-30 (notice especially the catena of verses

29-30). The three explanatory movements of verses 19-27 constitute three concentric circles, dominated by the key word "groan." Moreover, the three concentric circles form a crescendo, moving from the groaning of the creation (verse 22) to that of the Christians (verse 23), and finally to the groaning of the Spirit itself (verse 26).

Verses 18-30 are dominated by the key word "glory" (*doxa*), the term that serves as the frame of the passage (verses 19 and 30) and holds it together. In other words, all the other key terms of the section—"the sufferings" (*pathēmata* [cf. also verses 35-36]), "groaning" (*stenazō/stenagmoi*), "hope" (*elpis/elpizō*); cf. also "patience" (*hypomonē*), "wanting" (*apekdechomai*), and "the Spirit" (*pneuma*)—elucidate and elaborate the main theme of "the glory" of God, which in turn embraces them all.

Concretely speaking, the several levels of "groaning" are caused not only by "the sufferings of this present time" (verse 18), but also by "eager longing," "hope," and "patient waiting" (verses 19, 20, 24, 25), while it is especially the Spirit that makes this groaning in hope possible. However, the object of the Spirit's activity and of the hope of the creation and Christians alike is the glory of God, that is, the triumph of God over all suffering in his created world.

IV. Exegetical and Theological Issues

A. The flow of the passage has an apocalyptic-futuristic thrust: it announces the coming triumph of God and is pervaded with an "intense longing" (verse 19) for its actualization. Not only the creation but also Christians and even the Spirit itself participate in this chorus of longing. All expect the coming glory of God when the whole created order will be restored and will share in God's full presence. Then, in the words of the Revelation of John, "[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more" (21:4; cf. 7:17).

The threefold groaning of creation, Christians, and the Spirit is made all the more intense because of "the sufferings of this present time" (verse 18), specified in verse 35 as "hardship," "distress," "persecution," "famine," "nakedness," "peril," and "sword." However, verse 28 shows us the positive side of the thesis of verse 18 by declaring that from the perspective of the final glory of God "all things," that is, the sufferings of the present time, will be seen to have their beneficial purpose in God's plan of salvation: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

B. At this point we must be aware of the peculiar transition, if not

contradiction, between verses 1-17 and verses 18-30. In verses 1-17 we seem to be in the presence of an almost realized eschatology that stresses the separation of the church from the evil forces of the created world. Here the church celebrates the immanent and victorious character of the Spirit that, once given to it, now defines its life. And so the church exults in joyful confession: "When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness to our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (verses 15b-17a [my translation]). Indeed, we have here a picture of the church with its windows closed; it is the church against the world celebrating its removal from an evil world.

However, a basic shift from present triumph to future hope occurs in verse 17c: ". . . if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him." The immanent and victorious character of the Spirit in verses 1-17b seems strangely hushed and contradicted by the tone of verses 17c-30. Suddenly we hear not only about suffering but also about the Spirit, which no longer motivates Christians to look inward upon the glorious reality of the church but now compels them to open the windows of the church to a suffering world, a world caught in "futility" (verse 20) and in "bondage to decay" (verse 21).

In other words, contrary to verses 1-17b, with their picture of the church *against* the world, we now get a picture of the church *for* the world. Moreover, the solidarity of the church with the world is not motivated by the notion that the church is an elite body whose mission it is to save souls in a doomed world. Rather, Christians are reminded that they are still an integral part of the unredeemed creation and will be so until the day of God's final deliverance (verses 21, 23). Indeed, the mortal body of the Christian is, along with the creation itself, subject to the power of death (verse 20).

The agency of the Spirit in verses 18-30, therefore, seems quite different from that in verses 1-17. Our present status as children "of adoption," which stimulates our prayerful acclamation "Abba! Father!" (verse 15), becomes in verse 23 a future hope ("we wait for adoption"), because our bodies are still unredeemed. Moreover, the Spirit—so powerfully present in us in verses 1-17—now becomes a transcendent agent who helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us in "sighs too deep for words," since "we do not know how to pray as we ought" (verse 26)—a surprising statement in light of our (perfect) Abba prayer in verse 15.

A shift in apocalyptic perspective causes the basic difference between verses 1-17 and verses 18-30. Whereas the emphasis in verses 1-17 (where the word "Spirit" appears sixteen times) is on the Spirit as God's full

eschatological presence and power, in verses 18-30 the Spirit is now defined in relation to the future glory, that is, as "the first fruits" (verse 23) of God's coming glory (cf. verses 26-27).

C. The basic theological issue that Romans 8:17-30 raises for me concerns the relation of the future apocalyptic glory of God to Christian experience. Since the future glory of God is directly interwoven with other key terms in the text (see above), it follows that if the apocalyptic theme of the imminent glory of God cannot be maintained, the other key terms of this text disintegrate with it and lose their significance for us.

The problem becomes all the more acute in view of the important catalytic possibilities that this text offers. No other Pauline text broaches the subject matter of Romans 8. Not only its cosmic-universal scope, but also its ecological, psychosomatic features, and especially its insistence on the interwovenness of human reality with the stuff of the created world cannot fail to enrich the relevance of the gospel for our world.

However, all this becomes problematic if the vision of hope that permeates the text fails to answer the often "hopeless" burden of suffering our world inflicts upon us. Indeed, how can we realistically agree with Paul's basic theme that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (verse 18)? Are we not compelled to say instead that no amount of future glory can undo the moral injustice of communal and individual suffering? In the Pauline scheme the wrong that suffering causes to the individual is not answered in a way that is commensurate with the often unbearable costs of the unjust and tragic suffering meted out in this world.

Rudolf Bultmann's solution to the dilemma of the delay of the coming triumph of God is indeed profound, because in demythologizing the apocalyptic myth of the end time, he interprets the apocalyptic myth in terms of hope in a God who "is always One who comes" and is "permanent futurity."[1] We recognize, however, that Bultmann's existential rendering of the triumph of God sacrifices the cosmic and ecological dimensions of Paul's vision of hope.

And so the question faces us: although we as Christians may be tempted to do so, can we really surrender the apocalyptic vision of hope that the text of Romans offers us as a challenge? For we must remember that such a surrender destroys the very foundation of the gospel. Indeed, when the

[1] Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1956) 186, 208.

motivation and beckoning power of God's final triumph are discarded, the promissory character of God's act in Christ is also discarded along with the ethical mandate of the gospel to resist the powers of the world.

And finally such a surrender makes Christian life powerless. For how can Christians escape the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" in their lives? How can they enjoy the joyful presence of the love of God in Christ, while their brothers and sisters in the world are still overwhelmed, if not destroyed, by suffering and death? Thus the Christian vision of hope for a suffering world entails necessarily a life of intense expectation—a life of action and prayer, a life in which hope overcomes ever anew the threat of hopelessness and despair.

Preaching the Kingdom: Mark's Apocalyptic Call for Prophetic Engagement

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by Brian K. Blount

In Mark 13 the evangelist's theological portrait acquires its focus from verse 10, which proclaims the necessity of preaching the gospel: "And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations." It is an eschatological mandate that has been heightened with apocalyptic urgency. Verse 10 has not been given its due weight in the overall scheme of chapter 13 because, despite its apocalyptic context, it has been interpreted primarily in a historical manner. Interpreters have been interested in source-critical and related questions. Did it belong with verses 9-13 in the tradition? Was it inserted by Mark when he composed chapter 13? Does it deal with the Gentile mission? And if so, can it have been a true statement of Jesus, who seems, even by Mark's own portrayal (cf. 7:24-30), to have limited his ministry to Israel? These primarily historical questions, while helpful, miss the fundamental eschatological point. Because the verse functions as a key literary component in this apocalyptic mini-drama, its historical charge has been given a new eschatological life.

Throughout the Gospel's mythical presentation, Jesus (and through Jesus, God) is locked in a cosmic conflict waged on Palestinian soil. Healings, exorcisms, and nature miracles are all signs that the kingdom Jesus preaches, and in his preaching and actions himself represents, has engaged and is marching victoriously against the forces of oppressive, demonic resistance. His disciples, literary foils for Mark's own reading community, are to act in Jesus' name and for his sake to continue doing as he did. He sends them to heal and to exorcise, thereby enlisting them in his own cosmic campaign (cf. 3:13-19; 6:7,13.) Most significantly he directs them to preach. But this preaching, imitative of his own preaching because its substance remains the kingdom of God, is more than mere evangelistic refrain. As important as such a task is, it is more than the enlisting of Gentiles in the mission of Jesus' discipleship. Because they are, as Jesus did, to preach the kingdom, and thereby, through the very act of that eschatological preaching, to make the awesome reality of that kingdom immediately accessible, their mission is to become, as Jesus himself became, a tactical complement to God's

strategic design. In chapter 13 Jesus provides the tactical model in verses 1 and 2. His ministry climaxes in a challenge to the existing self-serving and oppressive power structures that proclaims their symbolic destruction and envisions a new communal construction of the elect. In chapter 13 this destruction-construction motif is the tactical yield. Those who follow in his name are given the responsibility of preaching that kingdom and thereby, through their words and actions, re-presenting both Jesus' cosmic challenge to the existing self-serving and oppressive institutions of power and his eschatological construction of God's community.

I. Dismissing Apocalyptic

When undertaking discussion of Mark's thirteenth chapter a commentator can at least seize comfort in the certitude that scholarly conclusions remain profoundly, and therefore provocatively, uncertain. Or, as Morna D. Hooker insists, "There are few things that can be said about Mark XIII without fear of contradiction."[1] For example, we now know that this celebrated "little apocalypse," while apocalyptic, is not really an apocalypse.[2] Clarity of thought in terms of the critical terminology becomes essential at this point. John J. Collins is helpful. He makes a necessary distinction between the terms apocalypse and apocalyptic eschatology.[3] Collins defines apocalypse as

[1] Morna D. Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation in Mark 13," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65 (1982) 78.

[2] Indeed, many scholars now argue that on the whole the text has much in common with the "farewell discourse." Usually delivered by a great religious leader like Moses or David, the farewell discourse amounted to a "last will and testament" issued to family or disciples. "This might include a survey of the past and its lessons; it almost always included a survey of the prospects, and especially the dangers and sufferings, of the future, together with an exhortation to remain faithful and steadfast in face of them" (D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* [New York: Penguin Books, 1963] 340). Unlike the farewell discourse, however, Jesus, as the principal figure, never mentions his own impending death. Still, John J. Collins notes that, like the farewell discourses, Mark 13 is mediated by a human figure, Jesus. And because this mediation is not uttered directly from heaven, the delivery of the visionary information is more oracular than apocalyptic (John J. Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 [1979] 9). As do the farewell discourses, Mark 13 exhorts its readers to remain faithful during foreseen difficulties. Even source critics who argue that Mark may have revised an already existing apocalyptic flyer acknowledge that the probable source was so significantly altered in the evangelist's literary program that the result cannot be considered an apocalypse. Cf. Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988) 325; Nineham, 339.

[3] Cf. John J. Collins, "Apocalyptic Literature," in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and George Nickelsburg (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) 345-370. Also Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre," for similar discussion. Collins also describes apocalypticism as a distinct social entity. It is a social ideology. Cf. Paul Hanson, "Apocalypticism," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962) 28-34. He argues that apocalypticism derives from apocalyptic eschatology just as apocalyptic eschatology derived from prophetic eschatology. "Historical and social conditions may lead a group to

a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.[4]

Mark 13 lacks several definitional criteria. There is no heavenly vision, no description of an otherworldly realm, no description of a demonic onslaught of the Antichrist in bizarre imagery, and nothing about the last judgment.[5] There is, however, revelatory content, a "set of ideas and motifs" about the end time, which Paul Hanson terms ἀποκάλυψις. This revelatory content belies an eschatological worldview that is most certainly apocalyptic. Its view of history is deterministic, it anticipates a crisis at the end of the world through visions of cosmic upheaval, and it maintains a dualistic understanding of human history where humans have a choice between siding with God's messianic representative or anti-messianic forces. As Klaus Koch argues, this apocalyptic eschatology is more than a literary phenomenon; it is a particular "attitude of mind." "We may define it . . . as 'speculation which—often in allegorical form . . .—aims to interpret the course of history and to reveal the end of the world.' "[6] This is certainly Mark's intent in chapter 13; a "historical review" is inserted into a narrative framework that aims to correlate the events in review with the dramatic occasion of the end time (τέλος).

It is this preoccupation with the predetermined end time, with its emphasis on a divine execution that neither needs nor desires human participation, that convinces many students of apocalyptic eschatology that such an otherworldly orientation has little to offer disciples interested in ethical direc-

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elevate that perspective [apocalyptic eschatology] to an ideology which resolves contradictions between hopes and historical realities and provides the group with an identity in relation to other social and political groups and to the deity. When this happens we witness the birth of an apocalyptic movement" (30).

[4] Collins, "Apocalyptic Literature," 342. Collins distinguishes between two subtypes of Jewish apocalypse. The first is a historical type that involves no otherworldly journey and includes an *ex eventu* prophecy of history culminating in eschatological crisis. Mark 13 most closely fits this pattern. Examples of this subtype include Daniel 7-12, the Animal Apocalypse (*1 Enoch* 85-90), the Apocalypse of Weeks (*1 Enoch* 93; 91:11-19), 4 Ezra, *2 Apocalypse of Baruch*, and *Jubilees*. The second involves otherworldly journeys that concentrate on spatial rather than temporal aspects. Included in this subcategory are the Book of Watchers (*1 Enoch* 1-36), the Similitudes of Enoch (*1 Enoch* 37-71), *2 Enoch*, *3 Apocalypse of Baruch*, the *Testament of Abraham*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the *Testament of Levi* 2-5, and the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*.

[5] Cf. Paul S. Pudussery, *Discipleship: A Call to Suffering and Glory* (Ph.D. diss., Pontifical Urban University, Rome, 1987) 143.

[6] Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1972) 33.

tion. Prophetic eschatology presents an alternative end-time orientation. The preaching of the Hebrew prophets (particularly the pre-exilic prophets) emphasized the role of human action and responsible decision. Human response to eschatological discussion of the Day of the Lord could effectively influence the manner of God's ultimate intervention. There was, therefore, indigenous to the discussion about the end time an ethical mandate for humans living in their present time.[7]

However, many scholars argue that, while prophecy may indeed be the link between the Old and New Testament thought worlds, there is little continuity between prophecy and apocalyptic. Gerhard von Rad, for instance, maintains that the deterministic worldview of apocalyptic derives primarily from wisdom literature and therefore lacks the ethical concern exhibited in the classical prophets.[8] Others like Paul Hanson argue that apocalyptic is so concerned with cosmic, otherworldly visions that ethical concerns for mundane reality are completely abandoned.[9] In his work, *Jesus the Messiah*, William Manson contends that Jesus had nothing in common with apocalyptic thought except the titles Messiah and Son of Man. In fact, for Manson, a telling distinction between the thought of Jesus and the thought of apocalyptic is the ethical concern exhibited in Jesus' preaching.[10] It is no wonder that apocalyptic texts like Mark 13 are often dismissed as ethically irrelevant. Scholars, preachers, and teachers interested in discussions of Christian responsibility in the world often omit this text from their scriptural surveys.

[7] For a fuller discussion on the debate regarding the relationship between prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic eschatology the following sources may be consulted. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972) 263-283; Lou Silberman, "The Human Deed in a Time of Despair: The Ethics of Apocalyptic," in *Essays on Old Testament Ethics*, ed. James C. Crenshaw and John J. Willis (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1974) 193-202; P. Hanson, "Apocalypticism"; R. R. Wilson, "From Prophecy to Apocalyptic," *Semeia* 21 (1982) 79-95; D. H. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1964); Martin Buber, "Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour," in *Pointing the Way* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957) 177-192.

[8] Von Rad argues that this concentration on determinism begins with the idea of "appointed time," which comes from the wisdom period of early Israel. Initially, he argues, it was not deterministic because, like so much ancient wisdom, there was really little theological import at all. It was in Ecclesiastes that determinism and theologizing began to take place simultaneously. The idea of an appointed time was thus given a totally deterministic bent. He points to Eccl. 6:10 as an example. He also suggests Sirach and Tobit as examples. He argues further that Israel attempted to maintain both freedom of will and determinism of God's design by allowing only two options of choice, the same options maintained in apocalyptic. A human could choose only between good and evil, designated as life or death. Von Rad therefore concludes that the bridge between the prophetic sense of history and apocalyptic determinism is wisdom.

[9] Cf. P. Hanson, "Old Testament Apocalyptic Reexamined," *Interpretation* 25 (1971) 469.

[10] Cf. Koch, 51-55.

This bias has been carried into a reading of Mark 13. Its "war in heaven," and its counsel to abandon solidarity with the rebel cause in favor of the command to simply "watch," have been manipulated to mean that Mark advocates a noncommittal, passive attitude, waiting for God to intervene and resolve all political contradictions.[11]

II. Reclaiming Apocalyptic

The voices that argue for discontinuity between prophecy and apocalyptic are not, however, without opposition. Indeed, it is D. H. Russell's famous dictum that apocalyptic is "prophecy in a new idiom."[12] Russell points out that there are already traces of apocalyptic eschatology in prophetic writings.[13] Particularly, the prophets, like the apocalyptists, believed that God had given them a message in dark and difficult times. But while the prophets foresaw that the coming Day of the Lord would arrive at the end of human history, the apocalyptists believed it would occur outside the realm of human history and reality. The apocalyptic τέλος was therefore, for Russell, a transformation of the prophetic Day of the Lord. "Indeed we may say that apocalyptic arose out of prophecy by developing and universalizing the conception of the Day of the Lord."[14] Key for this transformation is the higher degree of individualization in apocalyptic. Not only the nation, but also the individual appears before God on "that day" for judgment. It is in this turn towards the individual that many commentators find the ethical component of apocalyptic. Lou Silberman concludes that the new historical moment mandated such a transformation of thought. The military and political grip of the Greeks and Romans was so complete that all hope for self-rule and self-determination as a people was abandoned. If there were historical choices to be made they resided with individuals, or perhaps individual communities within Israel, but not with Israel as a whole. Therefore the apocalyptic ethical challenge went out to individuals and individual communities rather than to the nation itself. As Silberman himself puts it,

> this "person" [the people of Israel] . . . is absent for the apocalyptist and . . . therefore, limits his call. He can call only to individuals, setting

[11] Myers, 348.

[12] Cf. Russell, 92-96. A frequent argument against the primary relationship between apocalyptic and wisdom is the fact that wisdom literature does not include the eschatological orientation that remains primary in apocalyptic.

[13] Hanson also notes that apocalyptic eschatology is indicated in the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as well as Second Isaiah ("Apocalypticism," 32).

[14] Russell, 94. Russell believes that the transformation took place during the preaching of the post-exilic Hebrew prophets.

before them limited and specific ethical tasks that can and will provide a way in the meaningless present until such a time as the obedient people will reappear. The despair of the author in IV Ezra is engendered by the absence of Israel.[15]

Still, one cannot make theoretical determinations about the orientation and background of apocalyptic and then impose those findings on the literary text of an identifiable biblical community. In fact, the process must operate in the opposite direction. Armed with general information about the ethical orientation of apocalyptic one must move quickly to the community of interest and determine exactly how apocalyptic eschatology operated in that sociological circumstance. "The symbolic universe of an individual apocalyptic movement is not handed down to it ready-made by an authoritative antecedent tradition, but is formed within a specific historical-sociological matrix."[16] We therefore need to determine, with the assistance of a general knowledge about apocalyptic eschatology, the manner in which the life relation of the Markan community may have affected the way in which that community understood its apocalyptic symbols. We know from reading Mark 13 that the historical circumstance played a vital role in the evangelist's narration. His apocalyptic eschatology is updated to fit the historical circumstance that surrounds the impending siege of Jerusalem and fall of the temple to the Romans, who, since 63 B.C.E., had occupied Israel by the force of their seemingly omnipotent military and political will.[17] He therefore inserts a contemporary historical review[18] into an apoc-

[15] Silberman, 194.

[16] Hanson, "Apocalypticism," 29. Though R. R. Wilson opts for an anthropological rather than a sociological focus, his conclusion regarding the influence of social circumstance on the development of apocalyptic within a community is very similar. "Anthropological evidence shows any group can become an apocalyptic group if the right sociological conditions are available. Yet the shape of the group's apocalyptic program will depend on the cultural background of its members" (R. R. Wilson, 85).

[17] We find, in fact, that such "rehabilitation" of apocalyptic texts for new historical circumstances is commonplace in apocalyptic writings. Myers points out that the *Assumption of Moses* is a good example. The *Assumption*, originally written during the persecution of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) around 165-150 B.C.E., was updated for the period surrounding the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C.E. Fourth Ezra is an example of a reworking of Daniel in a new time so that Rome takes the place of the originally intended Seleucid opponents. Cf. Myers, 325-326.

[18] "Rumors of war" directs the readers' attention towards the Roman activities of the period. "Kingdom against kingdom" may well reflect the civil struggle occurring in Rome during the period just after Nero's death, which occasioned Vespasian's hurried return to the capital from his siege of Jerusalem. "Natural disasters" is thought to suggest the natural disasters like the famine of Palestine in the early 50s and the earthquakes and volcanic eruptions of Laodicea and Pompeii in 61 and 62. It is further agreed that 13:9-12 deals with the situation of Christians being brought to trial because of their beliefs. Mark 13:14-23 refers to the refugee situation that took place at the time of the siege and fall of Jerusalem.

alyptic-eschatological discussion about the end time. But to what end? To reclaim, we would argue, the prophetic call to ethical responsibility that is implicit in the thought world of apocalyptic eschatology. That is to say, we believe that Mark's intent in his thirteenth chapter was to reclaim apocalyptic eschatology for his time in such a way that he could use its heightened concern about the end time to intensify his call to responsible action in the present. His call was not directed towards Israel as a whole, whose institutionalized fate was now sealed, but to a localized, individual community within Israel. And the call was not one of simple decision between following the path of the Messiah and that of the anti-messianic forces, though it was also that. More importantly, he was calling them to a specific task, the eschatological task of preaching the apocalyptic kingdom of God.

A final clarification of terminology is critical. We recognize the term apocalyptic to be an adjectival description of the expectation of the *imminent* end of the world. Eschatology, on the other hand, is the "timeless" view whereby the closeness of God is characterized more by its *immediacy* than its temporal imminence.[19]

[19] For a fuller discussion of the issues involved in the discussion of apocalyptic and eschatology one might consider the debate that preceded and then centered on Ernst Käsemann's contention that apocalyptic is the "mother of Christian theology." Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), particularly chapters 4 and 5, "The Beginnings of Christian Theology" and "On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic." The theological discussion that took place between Ernst Käsemann and Rudolf Bultmann provides pertinent assistance. In making the claim that apocalyptic is the "mother of Christian theology," Käsemann opened himself up to a barrage of interpretational criticism. He was concerned that the dialectical theology of Karl Barth and the existentialism of Bultmann had replaced the central element of primitive Christian understanding. Because there is an undeniable mythical character to early Christian thought, a character that pervades the Gospel of Mark, one cannot, in Käsemann's view, dissolve its central apocalyptic elements through existential interpretation without losing the early Christian view of reality. Albert Schweitzer had already framed much of the discussion in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1906). "Men feared that to admit the claims of eschatology would abolish the significance of His words for our time; and hence there was a feverish eagerness to discover in them any elements that might be considered not eschatologically conditioned" (Schweitzer, 402). In the drive to maintain modern ethical relevance for ancient materials apocalypticism was shoved aside. Certainly this has been the case with Mark 13 as interpreters have sought to distill an enduring ethical message from the contingent apocalyptic shell.

Schweitzer made a critical distinction between apocalyptic and the eschatological meaning of Jesus' message. Utilizing Bultmann's designation (for even though Schweitzer did not use the term apocalyptic, his understanding of eschatology most clearly fits this modern term), we would recognize the former as an expectation of the imminent end of the world, and the latter as a "timeless" view whereby the closeness of God was characterized more by its immediacy than its temporal imminence (Hendrikus Boers, "Apocalyptic Eschatology in I Corinthians 15," *Interpretation* 21 [1967] 51).

In such a way, Schweitzer, in an effort to set Jesus' message free of its mythologically incarcerated time, de-historicized Jesus' thought, so that what was historically limited could be peeled away from a content of eternal validity. He thereby rejects the authority of apocalyptic, for he has denied any claim for the history of Jesus over all other history. Apocalyptic not only anticipates

Defining the kingdom of God as "the eschatological future brought about by God himself,"[20] Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that while Jesus and his message were fervently apocalyptic, his preaching and ministry emphasized the immediacy of the kingdom. In this way Pannenberg sees Jesus modifying the Jewish apocalyptic concept of the τέλος; God's kingdom lies not only in the distant future beyond time, but is immediate. As a result, the present is not independent of the future; the future makes an ethical claim upon the present. Ernst Käsemann, however, maintains that Jesus has more than modified Jewish apocalyptic. For him, apocalyptic is not as crucial an element in Jesus' teachings. The ethical imperative is rather maintained through the immediacy, the nearness of God, alone. Indeed, the preaching of Jesus is itself the manifestation of God's kingdom.[21] In either case, Jesus' thought is discontinuous with that of Jewish apocalyptic. Particularly for Käsemann, Jesus' thought was also distinct from that of the early Christian community. The distinction lay in the fact that the Easter community was characterized much more fundamentally than Jesus by an ardent expectation of an imminent parousia where Jesus' divinity, which Jesus himself had not established, played a crucial role. Jesus preached a kingdom immediately accessible; the early church preached an imminent kingdom that they identified with Jesus as Son of Man.

A problem results when one attempts to evaluate a text like Mark 13 by trying to determine where Jesus' message ends and Mark's begins. A literary

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the imminent arrival of the kingdom; it also makes a claim for the past history of Jesus "as part of a single apocalyptic drama in which Jesus remained central" (Boers, 51). But whether its orientation is past or future the central problem of apocalyptic remains the same. An apocalyptic interpretation of the New Testament cannot be reconciled with a continuing history (Boers, 52). Schweitzer's de-historicizing becomes crucial at just this point. While allowing Jesus to return to his own time, he attempts to salvage the validity of Jesus' message for all time. In his existentialist interpretation of apocalyptic Bultmann attempts the same maneuver, as does Karl Barth in his dialectical theology. We reach this conclusion after considering their debate regarding 1 Corinthians. Barth argues that Paul is not apocalyptic, but is eschatological in his discussion in chapter 15, and that in that chapter lies the focal point of his presentation to the church at Corinth. His ethical claims in the rest of the letter revolve around this eschatological center. Unlike Barth, Bultmann does not deny that there is apocalyptic in 1 Corinthians 15. However, he agrees that eschatology holds center stage. He also argues that the force of Paul's argument resides in chapter 13, the climactic ethical chapter that centers on the love command. The eschatological information in chapter 15 therefore supplements rather than centers the Pauline argument. Both men, despite their obvious disagreements, come to a similar conclusion regarding apocalyptic. Apocalyptic is a nonfactor in this ethically charged letter. In order to obtain Paul's eternally valid ethical message one must either reject (Barth) or ignore (Bultmann) the presence of apocalyptic, and interpret only the eschatological.

[20] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969) 53.

[21] Cf. Käsemann, 101, 112, 113.

evaluation such as ours, however, does not attempt to ascertain the different source messages in the text, but rather attempts to appreciate the complete message that emanates from the text as we have it before us. We would argue that when analyzed in this way one finds that Mark 13 maintains an emphasis that is both apocalyptic and eschatological. Speaking to his own unique historical moment, the evangelist establishes in this final form of the presentation an ethical directive whose traditional content, the kingdom of God, is eschatological, but whose driving force is the apocalyptic ushering in of that kingdom by the Son of Man. It is the apocalyptic orientation that not only heightens the urgency of his charge but gives it universal implications. It is apocalyptic that turns what could be conceived as a discussion about individual redemption into a call for global responsibility.

This concern about human responsibility for the world lies behind Mark's insertion of contemporary historical information, what Werner Kelber calls a "narrative rupture," into his apocalyptic discourse.[22] This is why Mark maintains that the events in question do not mark the end time, but are the birth pangs that precede it. This time of the birth pangs, their particular historical time, is the time of eschatological decision.

> Instead, the apocalyptic reviews of history serve to highlight the short period before the end, which is the actual time of the author, as a period of decision. The fact that the end is determined adds intensity to the call for decision, but the individual choice is not determined.[23]

III. Mark's Apocalyptic-Eschatological Charge

But the apocalyptic language of the moment has evidently confused Mark's discipleship community. His emphatic instruction that the events in historical review are birth pangs rather than a signal of the end itself betrays the reality that many in the community were committed more to speculation than decisive action. Like Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2, Mark is offering a corrective to apocalyptic enthusiasm. "In other words, Mark's teaching is aimed at Christians who are unduly excited and agitated by eschatological expectation; he reminds them that Christian discipleship involves mission and persecution before the final time of vindication."[24] But what, precisely, does this mission entail?

[22] Cf. Myers, 327. Cf. also Collins, "Apocalyptic Literature," 360. Collins argues that apocalyptists often intend "to express an interpretation of historical situations (often political crises) and to shape the human response to those situations."

[23] Collins, "Apocalyptic Literature," 360.

[24] Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation," 98.

If Mark does indeed challenge apocalyptic enthusiasm, what specific action does he offer in its place? What is this mission that Hooker speaks of? She believes Mark is making an argument for inaction rather than action, an apocalyptic waiting upon God, even in the midst of persecution.[25] Ched Myers offers a more appealing option. Recognizing that Mark is indeed updating apocalyptic eschatology according to the historical circumstances of his period, he suggests a plausible scenario. Writing just before the fall of Jerusalem, when Vespasian's armies have laid siege to the city, Mark entered an environment where apocalyptic eschatology had reached a fever pitch. Already, an insurrection was underway that promised to restore Israel's fortunes. The Romans responded predictably. But an initial Roman siege of the capital in 66 was thwarted, the Romans thrown back on their heels in humiliating defeat. The victorious mood surrounding the provisional Jewish government sparked the notion that perhaps now was the time when God would truly establish the kingdom on earth. Then, two years later, another propitious turn of events. While Vespasian's siege of the capital was underway in 68, the emperor Nero died, and Rome was catapulted into civil unrest. Because Vespasian was called back to Rome, he temporarily suspended his thrust against the Jewish rebels. "Only Yahweh could have worked not one but two miracles to save the holy city!"[26] Believing that God had indeed intervened, rebel leaders initiated an appeal for insurrectionary support. The attraction was a restored Davidic kingdom, which God, apparently, was in the process of constructing. The end was at hand. The charge to all faithful believers was to join the revolt! "All true Jews should come to the defense of Jerusalem."[27]

Mark, however, believing that Israel, as symbolized by the temple, was destined for destruction rather than restoration (cf. 11:11-26), counseled, like the prophet Jeremiah, that any defense of Jerusalem should be abandoned. This was not the end time, but the birth pangs in preparation for it. The false messiahs and prophets were those who counseled joining the revolt against Rome. Those who refused would be subject to persecution from the rebel leaders and their followers because they rejected their cause, just as they would be subject to persecution from Rome because they also rejected Roman jurisdiction. In other words, Mark was calling his followers to a nonaligned radicalism, or "revolutionary patience," that would lock

[25] Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation," 95.
[26] Myers, 328.
[27] Myers, 329.

them into a suicide squeeze between the Roman army and the rebel Jewish forces.[28]

Against Myers, we find it interesting that Mark's Jesus, who in Myers' own presentation maintains an active, confrontational posture of engagement with both human and cosmic power figures, would counsel that those who are to follow in his name should themselves be "patient" until his return. Whether it is revolutionary waiting or not, it is still waiting, and waiting allows the institutional and cosmic forces that Mark's Jesus combats to endure. It was not a propensity for waiting that compelled his cleansing of the temple or provoked a capital trial by the Roman and Jewish authorities. There must be another option, one that seeks from the disciples the same kind of confrontational behavior exhibited by Jesus throughout the Markan narrative. For as Myers himself realizes, this chapter encourages that those who follow Jesus must stand "in solidarity with the way of Jesus (*dia to onoma mou*, 13:13)."[29]

IV. An Exegetical Defense of Our Apocalyptic-Eschatological Proposal

Like the only other text in the Gospel that portrays a continuous Jesus sermon, chapter 4, Mark 13 is thematically centered around a sensory theme. Whereas in chapter 4 the subject was hearing, here in chapter 13 it is watching. In each of the chapter's major subsections a climactic introduction or conclusion is punctuated by the "watch" imperative.

In the introduction, verses 1-4, the disciples are counseled by Jesus to watch the temple buildings. The first major part of the sermon, initiated by a compound question from the disciples, is an eschatologically tinged historical review that proceeds from verse 5 to verse 23. The evangelist has carefully marked off this section with a thematic inclusion. The false messiahs who, in verse 5, attempt to take advantage of the political and military chaos of the historical moment have surfaced again at the conclusion of the historical review in verse 22. "The primary function of the first part of the speech is to refute the prophets and to discount all kingdom expectations from the war years. The war will bring suffering and death, not the full time of the kingdom."[30]

[28] Cf. Myers, 338: "The real issue is not the 'time of the end time,' but the imperative to discern the events of the war. The community is to take its stand against both the rebel restorationists and the Roman invaders."

[29] Myers, 334.

[30] Werner Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 69.

In verses 5-13, contemporary events like war, earthquake, and trial before hostile courts are used as signs indicative of the birth pangs of the end time.[31] However, after verse 5, the watch command is not issued until verse 9. This recognition is significant because it denotes a further subdivision. Thematically, the second watch command refers to the courtroom trials that must be endured in verses 9-13, rather than the activities of the false prophets in verses 5-6. And grammatically, the ὑμεῖς ἑαυτούς of verse 9 indicates a switch from the general historical travails of verses 7-8 to troubles that will be endured specifically by the readers in the Markan community. The section that comprises verses 14-23 is another historical review that anticipates the tragic events that will befall the city of Jerusalem and its temple.[32]

The second half of the sermon, verses 24-37, includes the highest concentration of pure apocalyptic symbolism in the chapter. Particularly in verses 24-27, where the overtly mythical language describes the darkening of the three celestial lights[33] and the coming of the Son of Man[34] on the clouds of heaven to gather the elect,[35] Mark has turned his attention from historical review to apocalyptic vision.[36] The command to watch, which

[31] Commentators note that most of these disasters are divine judgments from the Old Testament, which have become commonplace in apocalyptic descriptions of the end of the world. Cf. 1 Kings 8:37; Jer. 4:11ff.; Ezek. 5:12; 2 Esdras 9:13; 13:31; 15:14f.; *Sib. Or.* 3:633-664. For background on birth pangs, cf. Isa. 26:17; 66:8; Jer. 22:23; Hos. 13:13; Mic. 4:9f. Cf. Myers, 345-346.

[32] A full discussion of the contents of this section takes us beyond the scope of interest established by our thesis. For further information regarding the understanding of the section as a description of the events surrounding the Roman siege of Jerusalem see Myers, 335ff.; Nineham, 351ff.; Pudussery, 156ff.; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1957) 70. Of particular interest is the apocalyptic euphemism τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημωσεώς, which has background in Dan. 11:31; 12:11; and 1 Macc. 1:54. We agree with Myers who notes that it was originally coined for Antiochus Epiphanes' attempt to desecrate the temple in 168 B.C.E. Mark appropriates it and uses it to direct the reader's attention through the use of this coded symbolism to similar actions on the part of the Romans. It is interesting to note that while the Greek description of the desecration is neuter, the participle that follows and of which it should act as antecedent, ἑστηκότα, is masculine. This probably indicates a direct remembrance of Caligula's attempt to place a statue of himself in the temple. It is this historical event that is remembered as the Romans, now in 69 C.E., prepare to storm the city and the temple. The description that follows highlights the probable scenario of refugees fleeing the city after its envisioned fall. Cf. 1 Macc. 2:28.

[33] Cf. Isa. 13:10. Also Ezek. 32:7; Amos 8:9; Joel 2:10.

[34] Cf. Dan. 7:13.

[35] Cf. Isa. 11:11, 16; 27:12; Zech. 2:6-11; 10:6-11; *1 Enoch* 57, *Pss. Sol.* 11:3 for the gathering of the elect as a traditional idea of the gathering of Jews of the dispersion. In Zech. 2:6, the particular language of gathering from the four winds is used.

[36] Cf. Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1970) 237. Schweizer notes that every significant phrase in verses 24-27 is borrowed from the Old Testament. Cf. Joel 2:10; Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Dan. 7:13; Deut. 30:3; Zech. 2:10 (LXX).

obtains its urgency from that vision, occurs again at verse 33, and though the language changes from βλέπω to γρηγορέω at verse 34, the new vocabulary maintains the emphasis on watchfulness in verses 34, 35, and 37. But what, exactly, does this watching entail?

We maintain that the answer to the question lies in 13:10. We would suggest that a conscious literary design has guided Mark's strategic insertion of this verse.[37] The command to preach is, in his final construction, the glue that ties this apocalyptic-eschatological chapter together.

> We should pause before accepting the commonly held position that Mark 13:10 is an intrusive element weakly tied to a tightly knit literary pattern. Perhaps it is part of a pattern as well. The mission question, especially as it relates to the Gentiles, might prove to be more significant in Mark 13 than is usually noted.[38]

The eschatological significance of the verse is immediately established by the Markan phraseology. As Walter Grundmann recognizes, δεῖ has specified eschatological connotations in the New Testament. More specifically, every time it is used in Mark there are overt eschatological implications.[39]

> It is the δεῖ of the mysterious God who pursues His plans for the world in the eschatological event. Not a blind belief in destiny, but faith in God's eternal plans formulates this δεῖ. The δεῖ denotes that God is in Himself committed to these plans. It thus expresses a necessity which lies in the very nature of God and which issues in the execution of His plans in the eschatological event.[40]

Further, this is no mere indicative statement of what the future may bring; it is a command that the listening/reading community participate in the

[37] If there is one conclusion around which there has evolved a modicum of consensus it is that the final editor of the Markan narrative inserted verse 10 into the sermonic text of chapter 13. Cf. Nineham (347), who notes that the vocabulary of verse 10 is distinctly Markan. And while verses 9 and 11 are preoccupied with imagery surrounding the verb παραδίδωμι, verse 10 appears to introduce a novel theme. Pudussery (164) adds that while verses 9, 11, 12, and 13 are rather poetic in style, verse 10 is clearly prosaic. Cf. also Hooker, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1991) 310. Hooker adds that Matthew and Luke agree that verse 10 is out of place. Matthew moves it to the end of his section whereas Luke omits it altogether. It is also missing from Matthew's parallel passage, 10:17-21.

[38] Timothy J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989) 146.

[39] Cf. 8:31; 9:11; 13:7, 10, 14; 14:31.

[40] Walter Grundmann, "δεῖ, δέον ἐστι," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964-76) 2.23 [Hereafter abbreviated *TDNT*]. Cf. also Pudussery, 155.

eschatological task at hand. The verse is worded precisely so the message will be clear; "The Gospel is to be preached at all costs."[41] Contextual implications heighten the imperative emphasis. In the surrounding verses, 9 and 11, the primary verbs are demonstrably imperative. Mark has placed verse 10, with its eschatological marker of compulsion, in the midst of his discipleship commands to a community already undergoing persecution in order to indicate that their commands to "watch" and "testify" have an emphatic and prescriptive content.

He designates that content with the infinitive phrase, κηρυχθῆναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον. Their eschatological task, which mimics the one established for Jesus at 1:14-15, is the preaching of the gospel. But this preaching is more than the poetic eloquence of gifted public speech. This preaching is the eschatological realization, the making immediate, of the kingdom of God.

> κηρύσσειν does not mean the delivering of a learned and edifying or hortatory discourse in well-chosen words and a pleasant voice. It is the declaration of an event. Its true sense is "to proclaim." . . . The decisive thing is the action, the proclamation itself. For it accomplishes that which was expected by the OT prophets. The divine intervention takes place through the proclamation. Hence the proclamation itself is the new thing. Through it the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ comes.[42]

Myers has noted that Mark particularly connects the verb κηρύσσω with the powers and circumstances associated with the reality of the kingdom.[43] Jesus' preaching, and often the preaching of those helped by Jesus, are purposely aligned with healing stories. And in Mark's mythical presentation healing is more than a medical redress for a physical malady; it is a confrontational battle waged against demonic forces. Jesus' preaching-associated victories, in this regard, are every bit as cosmic as they are therapeutic. They represent the power of God's eschatological kingdom.

The proper object of preaching then is the εὐαγγέλιον, whose content is the kingdom of God. "To the many messages, however, the NT opposes the one Gospel, to the many accessions the one proclamation of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ."[44] The potency of that kingdom is not, however, wielded against cosmic forces alone, but is also directed against human agents caught up in

[41] Beasley-Murray, 41.

[42] Gerhard Friedrich, "κῆρυξ (ἱεροκῆρυξ), κηρύσσω," *TDNT* 3.703-704.

[43] Cf. Myers, 348-349. Also, Mark 1:38-39; 1:45; 3:14-15; 5:20; 6:12; 7:36.

[44] Gerhard Friedrich, "εὐαγγελιζομαι, εὐαγγέλιον," *TDNT* 2.725. This is particularly true of Mark, who, unlike the other synoptists, shows a marked preference for the noun. Luke never uses

their malicious control. Institutions and leaders of institutions who use power destructively are likewise targeted by the εὐαγγέλιον preacher and the eschatological power that preacher makes real. Thus, immediately after Jesus' preaching ministry is introduced, Mark sends him into the synagogues and brings him into confrontation with the Jewish leadership in the first controversy cycle of 2:1–3:6. Right from the start his cosmological proclamation of the kingdom of God is depicted as an eschatological call to arms that challenges the power brokers of Judaism.[45] The controversial engagements proceed throughout the narrative until they reach a climactic point at the temple cleansing in chapter 11, which is followed up by further confrontation at the end of chapter 12, and the ensuing prophecy of the temple's demise at the opening of chapter 13. "The fact that Mark has chosen to introduce the discourse with the prediction of the Temple's destruction in verses 1-2 is certainly a clue to his understanding of the material."[46]

Mark uses this train of narrative thought to establish a contextual destruction-construction motif. There can be no doubt that he wants to emphasize the fact that Jesus' preaching ministry has climaxed in 13:1-2 with a call for the temple's destruction. First, there is a subtle grammatical tie-in. Mark's interrogative reference in 13:4a to the temple destruction as ταῦτα is exactly the same as the interrogative reference to the temple

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it and Matthew uses it only four times, whereas Mark uses it eight times and never uses the verbal form εὐαγγελιζομαι. Because of its limited use as a noun outside of Mark, Friedrich agrees with Marxsen that Mark introduced the term himself into the Jesus story. Cf. Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1969) 124-125. Matthew's limited use of the substantive also demonstrates an understanding that the content of the εὐαγγελιον is the kingdom of God (cf. Mt. 24:14, which parallels 13:10). The same thing occurs in Mt. 9:35; and when Matthew uses the term independently of Mark in 4:23, he again designates the content as the kingdom of God. Friedrich also helpfully addresses the question as to whether Mark 1:1 has an objective or subjective genitive. Many commentators debate whether the gospel Mark speaks of is the gospel Jesus himself preached or the gospel of the early church whose content was Jesus. "There is also no need to decide between εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας and εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ, and the question whether we have a subjective or objective genitive in Mark 1:1: ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, loses its significance. Jesus brings in the βασιλεια. It is actualized in His word. Hence the message which He proclaims refers also to Him" ("εὐαγγελιζομαι," 728). Cf. also Marxsen, 148. It should also be noted that many manuscripts read "the gospel of the kingdom of God" at 1:14.

[45] Cf. Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992) 33. In discussing the opening verses of Mark 1, Marcus sees the Deutero-Isaian background as informing a confrontational understanding of the kingdom of God. "Read with this background in mind, the Synoptic sayings about entering the βασιλεια conceive of the βασιλεια not as a *place* but as God's eschatological extension of his kingly power into a lost world, and human beings are invited to *enter into*—that is, participate in—this divine extension of power."

[46] Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation," 83-84.

cleansing in 11:28.[47] The temple cleansing is then unambiguously tied to chapter 13 through the συκῆ (fig tree) imagery. In language strikingly reminiscent of the parabolic story of the cursed fig tree, which frames the temple cleansing episode in chapter 11, Mark closes the apocalyptic portion of chapter 13 with a parable centering on the leafing of a συκῆ. The temple, symbolic of oppressive Jewish institutions and leadership, is judged and found wanting. "The miracle [cursing of the fig tree], which stands alone as a miracle of judgment in the Synoptic tradition . . . from the very first was viewed as a symbolic cursing of unfruitful Israel."[48] The conclusion to chapter 12, verses 35-44, gives an explicit summary of the temple's perverse condition, and Jesus' challenge to it.[49] Therefore, its destruction in 13:1-2 is meant to signal the end of an era; it will no longer be the locus of the divine presence. "This prediction of Jesus should be understood against the general context of chapters 11-12. These chapters are almost entirely concerned with Jesus' action as well as teaching and his confrontations with the leaders of Israel and the temple."[50]

The destruction of the temple is subsequently connected in thought with a new, divine construction. Once again Mark begins subtly. In 13:4 there are twin ταῦτα references. While the first points back to the temple destruction in verses 1 and 2, the second, in verse 4b, points forward to the eschatological indications of the immediate presence of God's kingdom.[51] It is in this grammatical way that Mark ties the demise of the temple to the

[47] This use of the pronoun fits Markan predilection. As Schweizer (280) points out, in every previous case Mark uses the term to refer to a situation that has preceded, not followed, its use. Cf. 2:8; 6:2; 7:23; 8:7; 10:20; 11:28.

[48] Claus-Hunno Hunzinger, συκῆ, σῦκον" *TDNT* 7.756. Cf. also Beasley-Murray (23), who notes that the temple's destruction is symbolic of a judgment against Israel as a nation.

[49] Cf. Myers, 319-321. Myers argues that even the story of the widow's mite is indicative of politically and religiously sanctioned oppression. "However, bourgeois scholarship, oblivious to Mark's critique of the political economy of the temple, portrays the common theme as the contrast between the religious hypocrisy of the scribes and the genuine piety of the poor woman. Fortunately, recent work has overturned this exegetical tradition. . . . The last episode in the temple is a story of a widow being impoverished by her obligation to the temple cultus (12:41-44)" (320-321). Cf. also Kelber, 65-66: "In summing up Jesus' temple activity we observe that the kingdom has been dissociated from the Jerusalem temple. We have seen Jesus make three trips to the temple. On his first trip he surveyed everything, then withdrew. On his second trip he judged and disqualified the temple. On his third trip he defined and defended his own authority above and against that of the temple and its power structure. Far from leading to his enthronement on the temple as Davidic Messiah, Jesus' temple activity results in his separation from the temple. The kingdom of God and the temple are irreconcilably opposed to each other."

[50] Pudussery, 150-151.

[51] Cf. also Kelber, 67: "The disciples' question concerning the end of the temple and the accomplishment of all things assumes a connection between the destruction of the temple and the arrival of the kingdom."

oncoming of God's kingdom, whose immediacy is realized in the preaching of Jesus and those who follow in his name. In fact, G. R. Beasley-Murray is so convinced of the connection that he, echoing the thoughts of others, recognizes an explicit connection between the temple-destruction motif of 13:1-2 and the destruction-reconstruction motif exemplified in 14:58 and 15:29.[52]

> Another viewpoint is hinted at in the larger saying of Mk. 14:58: the old system is finished and is to be replaced by another of a higher order; in the new age of the Spirit [cf. 13:11] there is no room for the old covenant with its sacrifices and cultus, hence the old temple must pass away. This is complementary to the eschatological aspect and is in no contradiction to it.[53]

Such an interpretation gives coherence to a chapter that seems on the surface to be thematically disjointed. Consider the apparent break in thought that occurs between verses 4 and 5. In 13:2, Jesus predicts the temple's demise. The disciples then ask for a sign. But, instead of addressing their question in a way that remotely relates to the prediction of verse 2, Jesus appears to go off on a tangent about false prophets. We suggest an alternative reading that links the thought in these verses together, and makes sense in light of the overall theme of the chapter. Verses 1 and 3 are obviously introductory; they set the stage for the major statements that follow from Jesus and his disciples. Verses 2 and 4-5 set up a thematic chiasm that explains Mark's narrative intention. In verse 2 there are two central terms, οἰκοδομάς in 2a, which refers to the temple buildings, and καταλυθῇ in 2b, which refers to the temple's destruction. The disciples' ταῦτα-oriented question responds directly to the καταλυθῇ in 2b. Jesus' response in verse 5, μή . . . πλανήσῃ, would then not be an uninvited discourse on a completely new topic, but would refer back directly to the οἰκοδομάς of 2a. The context already suggests that the disciples, looking at the buildings in awe, have been misled by the imposing magnificence of the edifices. Jesus is now warning them explicitly not to be misled; these buildings are not so

[52] He lists Colani, Wellhausen, Dodd, and Brandon as supporters of this view, and even notes Loisy's argument that 13:2 is a "lifeless" version of the more "brilliant" oracle of 14:58 (Beasley-Murray, 23). One will also recognize that the western texts D and W adjusted the verse so that it would almost exactly match the statements in 14:58 and 15:29.

[53] Beasley-Murray, 22-23. Cf. also Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977). Though Mark shows 14:58 as given by false opponents, Juel sees it as ironically true.

magnificent that they cannot and will not be replaced by something truly magnificent.[54]

The reconstruction motif is apparent in Mark's choice of building terminology in another way. Though Mark uses the noun form, οἰκοδομή, only in 13:1-2, he uses the verb, οἰκοδομέω, in three other places. The first, 12:10, connects the word λίθος with the verb form just as the same word is connected with οἰκοδομή in 13:1-2. In 12:10, after the confrontational parable of the vineyard, which Jesus addresses unmistakably at the Jewish leadership, Jesus quotes Psalm 118. The stone that the builders rejected is to become head of the corner. The parallel word usage suggests that implicit in the destruction of 13:1-2 is a new construction whose foundational stone is Jesus. That this new construction will not be a building like the temple, but an eschatological community of the ἐκλεκτός, is implied when Mark then arranges for the only other uses of the οἰκοδομέω form in 14:58 and 15:29.[55] The new building not made with hands will be built on the foundation of the torn-asunder temple.

There is a similar suggestive use of the verb καταλύω, to destroy. Mark chooses to use it only three times. Besides 13:2, he only uses it in 14:58 and 15:29, and in each of those occasions the destruction is followed up by eschatological construction.

It now makes perfect sense that Mark would succeed his announcement of the temple's destruction with an eschatological review of his historical moment. "[His] images of cosmic cataclysm are drawn from the traditional apocalyptic myth of 'palingenesis,' the surpassing of the 'old' order by the 'new heaven and new earth.' "[56] It is in this context that the reading disciples are counseled to ally themselves with the new rather than with the old, or a restored form of the old as envisioned by the Jewish rebels.

It is now time to return to our discussion of verses 2-6. Above we sug-

[54] This interpretation is bolstered by the fact that, as Myers (330) observes, the subsection of verses 5-8 can be further subdivided at verse 7, which starts the actual review of historical difficulties. The ὅταν clause that opens it is a match for the ὅταν clause that starts another formal historical review at 13:14. This further sectional segmentation would leave verses 5 and 6 standing with enough independence that they could reflect back on the verses that precede them as well as connect forward.

[55] Cf. Otto Michel, "οἶκος, οἰκία," *TDNT* 5.119-159. Michel notes that "in the NT οἰκοδομή is a familiar figure of speech which is primarily used for the community" (145). Also, "in 14:58 οἰκοδομήσω denotes an eschatological act of Christ, a new authorisation by God. The Messiah will build the future temple and the new community" (139). Cf. also Marcus, 120-121, where he makes the same connections of language between 12:1-10 and 13:1-2: "These links suggest that the Old Testament context of the psalm quotation, with its references to the Temple liturgy, is in view in Mark 12:10-11 and that Jesus is being portrayed as the cornerstone of a new Temple."

[56] Myers, 338.

gested that a thematic chiasm forms between 2 and 4-5. We suggested that μή . . . πλανήση referred to the disciples' misunderstanding about the temple. Adding consideration to verse 6, we can now give that misunderstanding fuller clarity. The false prophets and messiahs attempt to use the historical events as an indication that the end is imminently at hand and that all Jews should therefore join in the effort of restoring the fortunes of Israel. Mark's message that his readers not be deceived indicates a double concern. First, the events are not the end, but are eschatological birth pangs. Second, the new thing God will create will not be a messianic restoration of Israel as it now exists, but a completely new eschatological "building." "He now sets about warning his disciples against joining those who would wage a messianic war in defense of the temple (13:14). The 'mountain' must be 'moved,' not restored."[57]

The historical review that Mark develops in his eschatological presentation serves notice that the message in 13:10 is directed towards the readers of his time, who, living in the precarious period after the death and resurrection of Jesus, are called to reenact his preaching ministry. The eschatologically tinged events mark their time as the time of the "birth pangs," and thereby establish that the message of that moment, δεῖ κηρυχθηναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, is their eschatological charge. This is why Mark laces his presentation of the Jesus discourse with the first-person genitive pronoun constructions, ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ and διὰ τὸ ὄνομα μου, whose placement in verses 9 and 13 form a thematic bracket around 13:10.[58] When the disciples go about their task of preaching the kingdom they are to do it in Jesus' name, for his sake; in other words, they are to take up the eschatological task that Jesus himself began.[59] As Jesus acts in God's name and does God's work, so the discipleship community is to act in Jesus' name and therefore do his work. As Hans Bietenhard observes, "The whole life of the Christian stands under the name of Jesus."[60] This intention to follow in Jesus' eschatological wake is so strong that even the false prophets and messiahs use a first person acclamation, ἐγώ εἰμι, in their attempt to garner converts.[61] We would agree with Myers that the most likely scenario finds them appealing

[57] Myers, 323.

[58] Cf. also Marxsen (129), who argues that 13:10 must be interpreted in light of the ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ of 13:9.

[59] Cf. Hans Bietenhard, "ὄνομα, ὀνομάζω," *TDNT* 5.271. Bietenhard notes that "he who says or does something in the name of someone appeals to this one, claims his authority."

[60] Bietenhard, 273.

[61] The only other uses of the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι in Mark (6:50; 14:62) are attributed to Jesus, and are meant to authenticate his identity.

for comrades in arms against the Roman invaders under the guise that they are the messianic representatives of God in whose name and for whose sake the discipleship community should follow.[62] But Mark is not merely issuing a negative command to beware the false messiahs; he has also formulated a positive decree to do as Jesus did, to preach the kingdom of God.

This eschatological preaching is so critical in Mark's presentation because it is billed as the precondition for the imminent onset of God's apocalyptic reality, which is to be ushered in by the Son of Man.[63] The impact of the Son of Man's apocalyptic authority is so intense, and in many ways frightening, because it threatens to tear down the existing structures of power in its eschatological construction of a new one. We note that in 13:24-27 the apocalyptic Son of Man will gather the elect who have already been eschatologically preestablished as an alternative to the doomed temple of 13:1-2 in the historical review of 13:20 and 22.

> It is the eschatological *communio sanctorum*, the society of the holy, the new distinctive, eschatological people of God, consisting of both the elect in heaven and the elect on earth. . . . Thus it is a new world of another kind which is made real when the kingdom of the Son of Man is revealed.[64]

Later, in the trial before the Sanhedrin, we find that Jesus is condemned precisely because of this same foreboding apocalyptic-eschatological combination. He threatens an eschatological destruction of the old temple and construction of the new in 14:58,[65] and claims apocalyptic justification in 14:62.

Once again the phrase ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ is significant. In each usage prior to chapter 13, 8:35 and 10:29, it is connected with a verb of action that sacrifices an old life or an old family for a new reality in Jesus. Jesus' eschatological ministry of preaching the gospel requires a corollary eschatological action on the part of his disciples which causes a tearing down of the old and a rebuilding in his image. It is for this reason that a chapter that begins with the eschatological destruction of the temple finds its conclusion

[62] Myers points to Menahem and Simon bar Giora, mentioned by Josephus, as examples of messianism during the period surrounding the Jewish war (337).

[63] Cf. Pudussery, 179-180: "The πρῶτον in Mk 13,10 suggests a certain measure of delay in the coming of the end and this interim period between Mk's present and the end could be seen as the time of the church's preaching to the whole world."

[64] Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954) 406.

[65] Cf. Schweizer (262), who argues that "the saying about the destruction of the temple in vs. 2 has been handed down in a different version in 14:58 and 15:29. It must be an authentic saying of Jesus since it caused the church obvious embarrassment."

in the eschatological and then apocalyptic gathering of a new worshiping reality, the community of the elect. "Jesus' whole proclamation is centered around his mission, which was not only to announce but to build the kingdom of God. This new temple, new community would be the eschatological Israel, and as such would include also Gentiles."[66]

This is why Mark describes the preaching ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ as εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς. Hermann Strathmann notes that "the phrase εἰς μαρτύριον with the dative of person refers . . . to an objective testimony which incriminates the person involved."[67] We are, in other words, not talking about missionary preaching alone, but preaching meant to convict. The eschatological kingdom challenged the old institutions and persons of power even as those who preached it were made to testify—and therefore preach in another guise—before the representatives of the old order.

It is in this eschatological reality of the new community, heightened by an apocalyptic urgency, that the ethical nature of Mark's call to preach finds life. In his debate with Rudolf Bultmann, Käsemann makes the helpful claim that without the future orientation of apocalyptic all hope for an ethical responsibility for the world is lost. He is acutely concerned about human ethical behavior within the Christian community. However, he maintains that only apocalyptic can structure the proper sense of concern for the world, and thereby mandate a Christian personal responsibility in the world. Social responsibility hinges on the awareness wrought by an ecclesiology that envisions Christians as the "people of God," which Mark calls in chapter 13 the gathering of the elect. "The individual Christian is what he is simply and solely as a member of the people of God."[68] The church becomes the way God responds in the world; thus the church must necessarily be responsible for the world. The concept is social, never individual, and the world is the construct in which the "people" lives and breathes, the construct that gives it shape, provides it the opportunity of active preparation for the time to come. Without this apocalyptic understanding Käsemann is afraid that people, addicted to a concept of individual redemption, will lose their sense of responsibility for the world, will make such activity of secondary importance, if indeed, it remains important at all.[69] This seems to be Mark's concern as well. In 13:10, despite the tragic circumstances

[66] Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970) 229.

[67] Hermann Strathmann, "μαρτυς, μαρτυρέω, *TDNT* 4.502-503.

[68] Käsemann, 116.

[69] Cf. also Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967) 133-138.

unfolding all around his community, he turns their attention away from speculation about their own existence towards their responsible mission that must reach all the world.

His rhetorical euphemism for their mission is "watching." Watching becomes an active re-presentation of Jesus and therefore part of the eschatological preaching endeavor. "In contrast to his source, Mark certainly regarded the faithfulness of the church in the time before the end as the real "watching," not the adherence to a belief that the end would come soon."[70] Here we agree with Timothy J. Geddert that there is a distinction between the terms for watching, βλέπω and γρηγορέω.[71] He argues persuasively that βλέπω is used for correct spiritual discernment that would protect the disciple from being misled by external appearances. Thus, one should see a spiritual reality beneath the great temple buildings, the false prophets and the courtroom prosecutions. γρηγορέω has a different function. It deals specifically with correct behavior.[72] We are suggesting, however, that Mark has, by placing these terms in the same narrative context, developed a situation whereby accurate spiritual perception leads directly into proper behavior. Mark does not want spiritual perception for its own sake, but directs it forcefully throughout the chapter towards active behavior. Knowing, that is, seeing, the importance of what the kingdom is and does, the disciple is called to act, to preach that kingdom. This is why, well before γρηγορέ ω appears in verse 34, Mark is already promoting responsible eschatological behavior as early as 13:5.

On the surface it appears that the visual sense is directed towards different objects: temple buildings in verse 2,[73] false prophets in verses 5 and 23, prosecutors in verse 9, and the time of the apocalyptic coming of the kingdom in verses 33, 34, 35, and 37. The component that ties each of these disparate elements together is the eschatological reality of the kingdom of God, made immediate through preaching, which will be a new "temple"

[70] Schweizer, 280.

[71] Geddert, 90.

[72] Geddert (105) notes that even the final parable, 13:33-37, which appears on the surface to counsel a waiting for the Lord's appearance, is in reality a call to discipleship action. "The Markan parable seems to speak its message most clearly if the primary call is to be a faithful watchman *on the master's behalf* because he is away, rather than to be a faithful watchman *for his appearance* because he is returning." The disciple is counseled to concentrate not on the return, but on his or her actions prior to it. "The point at issue is not whether or not a disciple will be found faithfully at his post at the single and precise instant of the master's return. The point at issue is whether or not he has been faithful *right through* the long night of waiting" (105).

[73] Cf. Myers (330), who also sees rhetorical interplay between βλέπεις in 13:2 and βλέπετε elsewhere. Also, Geddert, 86.

whose existence in the present historical moment of the elect is a prefiguration of its apocalyptic fulfillment. They are not to allow false prophets and messiahs to lead them away from its "new" reality. They are instead to preach, and in the preaching to initiate an eschatological challenge to contemporary power structures that will lead to their eventual collapse, as Jesus' attack on the temple climaxed with a prophecy of its demise. And they are to preach in spite of the persecutions that will come as a result of their mission efforts.

> Mark 13:9 is certainly not a warning designed to help disciples avert persecution. It is an invitation to go boldly into and through the persecutions that will come in response to a person's allegiance to Christ, for therein the deepest levels of discipleship are achieved and therein the greatest opportunities to advance the Gospel are found.[74]

And they are to fulfill this eschatological task because the apocalyptic institution of the gathered community of the elect will not occur without it.

But, as we have already suggested, there will be a price. Chapter 13 finds its narrative positioning between chapter 12, which climaxes in a challenge to the "old" temple-state, and the passion narrative for a reason.[75] Jesus' presentation of the confrontational eschatological kingdom had a price; the cost will be just as high for those who follow in his name. Mark makes this clear when he brackets 13:10 with verses 9, 11, and 12. The predominant theme in each comes from the verb παραδίδωμι, which Mark uses as a technical term for eschatologically charged suffering. Their preaching, because of what it represents, will attract the same kinds of response as Jesus' kingdom ministry. In other words, suffering, cross bearing as it lives itself out in 13:9-13, is a tactical result, not the strategic goal of the Markan community. The members of Mark's community are not "called to suffer."[76] They are called to preach the gospel. Because of the confrontational nature of *that* calling, the world they confront will persecute them in order to stop them. Suffering, then, is a tactical result of the call, not the call itself. That is to say, suffering does not lead to glory, but the glorious vision of the apocalyptic kingdom enables the discipleship community to endure the suffering that occurs in response to their eschatological preaching. It is the eschatological preaching that becomes the road to apocalyptic glory.

[74] Geddert, 132.

[75] The parallels between the supplementary parables at the end of chapter 13 and the language and timing in Gethsemane have been widely noted since Lightfoot.

[76] Cf. Marcus, 93.

They will suffer as a result of their preaching a kingdom that confronts existing power bases and offers a new power in their eschatological community. What happened to Jesus, for the same reason it happened to him, will happen to those acting, preaching, in his name. "The disciples must expect to suffer as followers of Christ: but those sufferings are not to be misunderstood as signs that the end is at hand. Rather *they result from the preaching of the gospel.*"[77]

Mark's intention was therefore to use apocalyptic imagery to heighten urgency for the eschatological task of preaching the kingdom of God. As Schweizer suggests,

> The goal is not the annihilation of his enemies or their condemnation to everlasting punishment. It is the power and glory of the Son of Man, which involves the homecoming of the dispersed to ultimate fellowship with their God.[78]

The exhortation is to preach, because in their preaching the confrontational power of the eschatological kingdom becomes real in present human circumstances. It is not an artistic preaching of eloquent words and titillating illustration. It is an eschatological event backed up by apocalyptic assurance; it is a preaching of powerful challenge and attack. It is not revolutionary waiting; it is revolutionary engagement. It is a battling against and demolition of the old symbols of authority and power, and an awesome re-presentation, indeed eschatological procreation of the new. This is why, in the midst of his apocalyptic-eschatological sermon, Mark's Jesus pauses for a moment and adds, καὶ εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη πρῶτον δεῖ κηρυχθῆναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον.

[77] Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation," 89.
[78] Schweizer, 277.

Revelation 19-21: End without Closure

by M. Eugene Boring

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I BEGIN WITH the bottom line, a one-sentence thesis: *Revelation pictures the end as coming soon, but without closure, presenting us with a picture that functions as a call to ethical responsibility and care for the world.*

I. Revelation Pictures

In the final scene of *The Graduate*, a movie that is revered as a classic in some circles, Dustin Hoffman stands alone on the balcony of a church. A wedding is taking place in the sanctuary below. The viewer sees him against the background of a stained-glass window, and hears him as he stretches out his arms and emits an anguished cry, "Elaine, Elaine. . . ."

What does this mean? The author and director resist the teacher's temptation to explain in prosaic, discursive, language. There are no footnotes, no "notice the symbolism, dear reader or viewer." The movie communicates what it has to say by presenting us a picture, and if it has any meaning, the viewer must cooperate in producing it, at the risk of misinterpretation or overinterpretation.

Revelation's meaning is inextricably embedded in its pictures, even more so than the film.[1] Yet Revelation functions not by presenting us with predrawn pictures projected on the screen, but by giving us words read forth in the worshiping congregation, words that evoke pictures in our own imaginations.[2]

II. Revelation Pictures the End

The church has appropriately placed Revelation as the last book of the Bible. John did not compose his prophetic-pastoral letter as scripture to be placed in a Bible, at the end or anywhere else. He did not think the world was going to last long enough for there to be a collection of "New Testament" scriptures. But he did put his writing at least on a par with the

[1] Note John's own terms for what he is doing. He calls his presentation a vision (ὅρασις [9:17]), using εἶδον (45 times) and ἰδού (25 times).

[2] Cf. 1:3. Revelation communicates its meaning *aurally* to the *community* gathered for *worship*, in contrast to the audio-*visual* communication to a collection of *individuals* assembled for *entertainment* in the movie theater, but also in contrast to the *silent* reading of the *individual* Bible reader who reflectively *studies*.

scriptures of the Old Covenant. He considered himself a prophet inspired by the Holy Spirit, not only in the same series as the Hebrew prophets, but as their climax and conclusion.[3]

He is himself steeped in these prophetic scriptures, as is his writing. Though he never explicitly quotes the Bible, which would break the unity between there-and-then Bible and here-and-now life, he writes for readers/hearers who will recognize many of the five hundred allusions and echoes of the biblical story.[4]

And he did write as the conclusion of the biblical story. The Dustin Hoffman scene from *The Graduate* could mean anything or nothing to one who wandered in off the street and saw only that scene. But its meaning comes at the end of a story.

> Benjamin is a young man full of promise who has already made a good record in college. He is the envy of all the middle-aged and older, who say to themselves and sometimes to him, "If I were just your age again. . . ."
>
> He returns home, and already at his graduation party, the world has turned sour and nothing fits the expected pattern. The world is not what it should be. His whole life stretches before him. Nothing is worth doing. The disparity between his own unrecognized and unfocused longings and the values of the culture is summed up in one scene, as a would-be advisor, a successful businessman, corners him in the kitchen and whispers the word in his ear that is the presumed key to the future: "Plastics."
>
> Benjie is seduced by an older woman who already has everything people in the hospital and the ghetto dream about and say "if only. . . ." Mrs. Robinson has good health, good looks, big house, big car, lots of money.
>
> They have a shabby affair, amusing to the bored spectator in the theater audience, but bringing no fulfillment or happiness to either Mrs. Robinson or Benjamin, and leaving the world the same dingy gray it was before.
>
> Then something happens to Benjie. He meets an interesting young woman, falls in love, and the world and life are different. But the young woman, Elaine, is Elaine Robinson, Mrs. Robinson's college-age daughter.

[3] Cf. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 115, 117.

[4] For details on the manner and quantity of John's allusory use of the scriptures, see M. Eugene Boring, *Sayings of the Risen Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 95-103. Readers/hearers in whose imaginations nothing happens when they read/hear such words as "Balaam," "Jezebel," and "ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι" simply do not get what the book has to say.

The Robinsons find out about Benjie's and Elaine's love, and Mrs. Robinson tries to destroy it by telling Elaine a scandalous story about Benjamin, and by spiriting her away to another town, where they finally arrange for her to marry a proper young man.

In the final scene of the movie, the wedding is taking place, and Benjamin is speeding through southern California in his little red sports car. The involved viewing audience is pulling for him to get there in time. But rather than arriving in the nick of time, he runs out of gas, and when he finally comes screeching up in a cab, and dashes into the church and up on the balcony, he and the viewing audience can see it is too late.

So it's not a Doris Day or Walt Disney or John Wayne movie. Sometimes the cavalry gets there too late, or the angels don't arrive at all. But come on, shrugs the audience—that's the way life is; not all stories have happy endings. Maybe none of them do. Sometimes it's just too late. Get real.

Benjie stretches out his hands, and cries in anguish, "Elaine, Elaine. . . ." Some in the audience will remember, if only subliminally, another who stretched out his hands and cried, "Eli, Eli. . . ."

Then he runs down to the sanctuary, grabs a big bronze cross, brandishes it against the ushers, seizes the bride and runs outside with her, and places the cross between the two door handles of the church so that they can't be opened. Benjamin and Elaine run and jump on a bus and ride off into the sunset. End of story.

Even when it's too late, it's not too late.

John's talk of the end has the liberating crucifixion of the Lamb of God and the marriage supper of the Lamb as omnipresent background imagery. In the foreground, his pictures of the end, with its return of Christ, last battle, binding of Satan, one-thousand-year reign, last judgment, and coming of the New Jerusalem, is not random, not disruptive (despite all the violence), but the end of a story. If the theater had caught fire during a showing of *The Graduate*, that would have been an end of sorts, but not the kind of end pictured in Revelation 20-21. For John, ἔσχατος is a synonym of τέλος.[5]

Revelation 20-21 pictures the end of a story whose decisive scene has already taken place. John writes about the end of history, the coming of the

[5] For ἔσχατος see 1:17; 2:8; 15:1; 21:6, 9; and especially 22:13: ἐγω τὸ ἄλφα και τὸ ὦ, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ἡ ἀρχὴ και το τέλος. While τέλος can mean simply "end," in Revelation as in the New Testament generally it has the connotation of "consummation, goal, completion."

New Jerusalem, not because he has a theory about the coming resurrection of the dead, but because of his faith in the resurrection of Jesus as something that has already happened. The meaning of that story is "even when it's too late, it's not too late."

John's apocalypse, from first word to last, is about the end, but not in a speculative sense. He writes for the encouragement of his hearers/readers who find themselves in a desperate situation—some without any awareness of the crucial time in which they live.[6] The encouragement is not only "your distress will not last long, so hang in there," but "your life is part of a story, a story that began before you were born,[7] a story that will come to a worthy conclusion." John's revelation pictures the end of the story that began in Genesis 1 and continues through his Bible, but will not go on forever. It has already had its denouement, and will have its final chapter.

III. Revelation Pictures the End as Coming Soon

Much of earliest Christianity lived in the glow of the dawning end.[8] By John's time, at the beginning of the third Christian generation, there had already been hermeneutical moves to come to terms with the failure of the parousia. The two basic options in dealing with the lack of fulfillment of the hope expressed in the phrase "the end is coming soon" are to reinterpret either "soon" or "end." The former option, " 'soon' doesn't mean 'soon,' " was taken by several New Testament authors, the clearest examples being Luke-Acts, 2 Thessalonians, and 2 Peter. In this reinterpretation, the parousia is postponed; the end is still expected, but no longer soon.

There was another option: The near expectation is preserved, but it is no longer the expectation of the end. " 'End' doesn't mean 'end.' " The Fourth Gospel takes this option: all that was expected to happen eschatologically did in fact happen soon, that is, it has happened already, in the here and now. Not only the coming of the Messiah, but the resurrection (11:23-27),

[6] John expected a great persecution of all faithful Christians, who could expect to be martyred if they held fast to their faith (2:10; 3:10). But it was not only persecution that was the threat to faith, but also the pervasive Roman culture and ideology, which Christians were too inclined to adopt as their own.

[7] John integrates the lives of his hearers/readers into the saving plan of God throughout history, from creation to eschaton. Though they are contingent historical beings who did not exist before history, their lives are integrated in the story that began before human history. This is the meaning of "names . . . written in the book of life before the foundation of the world" (17:8).

[8] 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 7:25-31; 15:51-58; cf. 1 Pet. 4:7: "The end of all things is near."

judgment (12:31), and eternal life (3:36; 5:24; 17:3; 1 Jn. 5:11-13) are already present.[9]

But Revelation represents a resurgence of the near expectation of earliest Christianity. Both "soon" and "end" are affirmed as real. Now the end really is coming soon.[10] This near expectation is not marginal or vestigial in Revelation, which begins and ends with it, and weaves it into the text throughout.

1:1, 3—"What must take place quickly" and "the time is near" are almost the opening words of Revelation.

2:16—The risen Jesus warns those in Pergamum to repent, because he is coming soon.

2:25—The risen Jesus encourages the faithful at Thyatira to hold fast what they have "until I come." While no interval is specified before this "coming" is to occur, the word loses its function of encouragement to steadfast endurance if a long period is intended, and becomes utterly meaningless if a span of centuries is meant.

3:11—Similarly to the church at Philadelphia, "I am coming soon" functions as encouragement to faithfulness.

3:20—"Behold I stand at the door and knock" is not only a spatial image for the church at Laodicea, but a temporal image often found in apocalyptic that reflects the shortness of time before the coming of Christ; he is already at the door (cf. Mk. 13:29; Lk. 12:36; Jas. 5:9).

6:11—The souls of the martyrs already in heaven who cry out for God's eschatological judgment of the world and ask, "How long?" receive the response that they must wait "only a little longer."

10:6—The "mighty angel" in the vision swears by the Creator that there is to be "no more delay," but that the "mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets," that is, the divine plan for the establishment of God's just rule at the end of history, is about to be fulfilled.

11:2-3; 12:6—The longest period mentioned in Revelation is this span of time described variously as forty-two months, or 1260 days, derived from

[9] It is debated whether the first edition of the Gospel of John had entirely reinterpreted early Christian expectation in terms of realized eschatology (so Rudolf Bultmann). There can be no question, however, that even the canonical form of the Gospel, while (re-?) admitting futuristic eschatology into the Gospel, has shifted the center of gravity from the future to the present.

[10] John is not alone in this. Matthew and 1 Peter, written at approximately the same time as Revelation, likewise reassert the near expectation of the parousia. Matthew's heightening of the temporal nearness of the parousia can be seen by a comparison of Matthew 24 with his source, Mark 13. Cf. 1 Pet. 4:7.

the period of 3½ years prophesied in Daniel (7:25; 8:14; 9:27; 12:7, 11, 12). This period became a traditional apocalyptic time frame (cf. Lk. 4:26 and Jas. 5:17 with 1 Kings 17:1 and 18:1). While there is no reason to think John took the period as a literally exact definition of how much time remained before the end, there is also no reason to interpret it in terms of generations or centuries, as the context in each instance makes clear.

12:12—The evil that John's churches are suffering will intensify, in John's view, because the devil "knows that his time is short."

17:10—There are to be seven "kings" altogether, and John and his hearers/readers live in the time of the sixth. While this passage is difficult to interpret precisely (see the commentary below), it is clear that in John's view only one more "king" (= emperor) is to reign before the eschatological events begin.

22:6—The angel declares that the preceding visions reveal "what must soon take place."

22:7—The risen Christ declares "I am coming soon."

22:10—In contrast to Daniel, which was composed in the literary form of a document written centuries before the events with which it deals were to take place and then "sealed" until the appropriate time, Revelation is not to be sealed, "for the time is near," that is, it deals with events of the time in which it is written.

22:12—The risen Christ declares (again!) he is coming soon.

22:20—"Surely I am coming soon" are the last words from heaven John hears, as "soon" was his own first word in 1:1.

Since the near end is not marginal in Revelation's view of things, but is woven into the fabric of its theology, the question of just what John expected to happen soon is likewise a central issue.

IV. Revelation Pictures the Real End of the World and History

Just as "soon" means "soon," so "end" means "end." John's picture of the end is inseparable from his picture of the coming of Jesus, such that Jesus can "come" without the end, but the end cannot come without Jesus. John affirms, and represents in pictures that are not conceptually consistent, more than one view of the "coming" of Jesus.

1) Jesus is present among the churches in the here and now (e.g., among the lampstands [1:13, 20]). Just as God not only saved the three Hebrew youths from the fire, but "one like a son of the gods" was with them in it (Dan. 3:25 [RSV]), so the "one like the Son of Man" is present with his churches during their time of trial.

2) Jesus comes in historical crises within this world. The first church addressed, as well as the last, is given promises and threats of the conditional coming of the Lord, who visits in judgment and grace during the historical sojourn of the church (2:5; 3:20).

3) John's hope for the coming of Jesus is not exhausted in these two understandings. In his theology, there will be a final end of the world as we know it, including the return of Christ, resurrection, and judgment, all of which is included in his expectation of ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει. Revelation pictures that real end of the objective world and history.

Here there is an important exegetical point: what John expects is not a historical crisis alone. Since one of the most popular and helpful commentaries on Revelation advocates a different point of view, the point is worth elaborating. G. B. Caird's commentary poses the question "whether the crisis John expected was the Parousia or persecution"[11] and repeatedly answers his own question by arguing that "John's coming crisis was simply the persecution of the church, and . . . the varied imagery of the book has no other purpose than this, to disclose to the prospective martyrs the real nature of their suffering and its place in the eternal plan of God."[12] He thus understands such texts as the picture of the descent of the New Jerusalem to mean that "wherever a man lives by faith in Christ and bears witness to that faith without counting the cost, there is the holy city coming down out of heaven from God."[13] Exegesis of this sort is somewhat strained in dealing with texts such as 6:12-17—the sixth seal—in which falling stars, the heaven's being rolled up like a scroll, and the displacement of mountains and islands must be understood to mean only "the overthrow of a worldly

[11] *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 27. Paul Minear, who once declared this to be the best single commentary in English (Review of Caird's *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 [1967] 230), shares its central perspective in his own later commentary: "I insist that John said nothing at all about the 'end of the world' " (*I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse* [Washington: Corpus Books, 1968] 265).

[12] *Revelation*, 12. Cf. p. 236: "What did John think was 'bound to happen soon?' Certainly not the End, which was at least a millennium away. He expected an event so important that it could properly be described in eschatological terms. . . . That event was the persecution, in which he saw God's victory over Babylon, as surely as in the Cross he had seen God's victory over Satan." He then generalizes: "It is possible that 'realized eschatology' is a tautology, because only literalists ever used eschatological language for any other purpose than to give a theological interpretation to the critical moment that is called Today (Heb. 3:13)." Cf. also p. 291: "The thesis of this book is that the one imminent event which John expected was persecution . . . an eternal present." Cf. also p. 285, where Revelation is said to have "a realized eschatology."

[13] Commenting on 3:12 (*Revelation*, 55). On 21:1-8: "The descent of the city is not a single far-off event but a permanent spiritual fact" (*Revelation*, 257).

political order."[14] The sharpness of Caird's point is somewhat mitigated, however, by his view that, after all, John does expect a final end to the world, though this is not what he expected to happen soon.[15]

Some have been quite willing to concede the exegetical point that John's first-century apocalypticism allowed him to affirm the imminent dissolution of the cosmos, but that it cannot mean this to us moderns who no longer share John's apocalyptic worldview. Perhaps the most common alternative to John's view of the end of the world is to internalize and individualize his talk of the end: the individual's life in history will come to an end. In this view, John's pictures of the end of the world—the second coming of Christ, the resurrection and judgment, the descent of the holy city—become the end of the individual's own life. My passing from death to authentic life in Christ replaces the resurrection of Jesus; the individual's historicity replaces the world's history. This approach has taken many forms in popular Christianity, but its most articulate and influential exponent in the twentieth century was Rudolf Bultmann. While Bultmannian theology is considered passé in broad circles of contemporary theology, so that debating with it is regarded as beating a dead horse, the lingering effects of a Bultmannian approach to interpreting apocalyptic are still very much with us.[16]

A second hermeneutical option has been that of process philosophy and theology, of which there are several varieties. Russell Pregeant speaks most forthrightly for one stream:

> Process thought denies the intelligibility of the concepts of an end to time or an interventionary judgment that disrupts the course of human (or natural) events. . . . The very notion of a final state of affairs becomes unintelligible. And because God is neither supernatural ("outside" the universe) nor in absolute control of lesser entities, the hope for a just

[14] *Revelation*, 90. Such exegesis understands the apocalyptic visions to be only illustrations of a point that can be made more clearly in straightforward language: even in the apocalypse, non-apocalyptic is the key to apocalyptic (Caird, *Revelation*, 32). This means that the visionary, pictorial mode of communication is in danger of being understood merely as illustrative material for a point that must be made in discursive language in order to be "clear."

[15] E.g., "The Christ who will come one day in the sight of all comes constantly to those who have the faith to perceive him" (Caird, *Revelation*, 19; cf. also 262-263).

[16] See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955) 2.33-94; *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957); "The Interpretation of Mythical Eschatology," in *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM Press, 1958); *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958) 51-56; "The New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. W. Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) 1-44; *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971) 247-261; et passim.

order eventually to be imposed upon human history by the cosmic regent cannot be embraced. . . . Process-relational thought can help us articulate this sense of eternal meaning. While it rejects an end to the cosmic process, it affirms an ongoing process of consummation in God's own life.[17]

A third approach to responding to John's talk of the end has been in terms of literature and psychology. Frank Kermode's *Sense of an Ending* is a good example of reducing eschatological thought to a projection of human need. "As the theologians say, we 'live from the End', even if the world should be endless. We need ends and kairoi and the pleroma, even now when the history of the world has so terribly and so untidily expanded its endless successiveness."[18] It is clear, however, that whether or not it is a matter of projecting John's or our needs on a cosmic screen, Revelation pictures the real end of the world.

V. Revelation Does Not Picture Closure

By saying that Revelation pictures the end without closure, I intend two things. 1) I mean that the mind of the hearer/reader does not obtain conceptual clarity and satisfaction. The two early Christian options mentioned above are both neat; both have a kind of closure; both leave the mind logically satisfied. By eliminating either "soon" or "end," the mental tension of the primal eschatological affirmations is eliminated or reduced to manageable proportions, and a kind of closure is attained. But while Revelation pictures a real end, it does not picture closure. In trying to speak of the end, John knows that one should not claim too much, even as an inspired prophet. The seven seals can be opened and their contents disclosed to us earthly historical creatures; but when the seven thunders sound, what they say is not to be communicated (10:4).[19] The new (= eschatologi-

[17] Russell Pregeant, *Mystery without Magic* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988) 163-164. See also Pregeant, "Grace and Recompense: Reflections on a Pauline Paradox," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1979) 90.

[18] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) 63.

[19] Cf. Paul, a prophet (1 Cor. 14:6 [cf. Boring, *Sayings of the Risen Jesus*, 30-36]) who is caught up into the third heaven and receives "revelations from the Lord," yet these revelations can/may not be communicated (2 Cor. 12:1-4). Because of the limitations of human conceptuality and historical, finite existence, even inspired prophecies remain fragmentary (1 Cor. 13:12).

Robert McAfee Brown is known as an activist in the civil-rights movement, the anti-war movement, one who lives a sane responsible lifestyle over against the consumerism of our culture. He is himself involved in this world, sees Christian life in terms of responsibility in and for this world, and has never to my knowledge been accused of being an "other-worldly" apocalyptist. Nor is he a professional Bible scholar, with a professional ax to grind in commending apocalyptic

cal) song sung by the redeemed in heaven cannot be learned by anyone else (14:3). Even the one whose name is "The Word of God" and whose name is inscribed on his thigh, "King of kings and Lord of lords" (19:13, 16), is at the same time the one whose name is written, but known only to himself (19:12).[20]

2) The second thing I mean by claiming that Revelation presents end without closure is that the final scene concludes but does not close. Just as it leaves our mind teased into active thought but not conceptually clear, so it itself is not a static picture. It does not achieve equilibrium. The world comes to an end, but does not come to rest.[21] The picture is at the furthest pole from nirvana.

This is seen already in the literary structure, in which there are *seven* concluding scenes, more synchronic than diachronic.[22] To have one concluding scene is a kind of closure. If someone asks, "What will the end be?" and John holds up a single picture, his one picture may turn out to be *wrong*, but it can be *clear*, and more logically satisfying than what he does in fact do, namely, hold up seven pictures.

Furthermore, if one must have more than one picture in order to portray

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thought. A few years ago when a wave of "story theology" was washing across the seminaries in this country, he gave some lectures on the story line of the Bible. His final lecture at Phillips Graduate Seminary where I was then teaching had to do with the final scene in the biblical story: "They lived happily ever after—or did they?" He held up before us the apocalyptic pictures of the Bible, affirmed them, and asked us to affirm them. In the discussion afterwards I asked him whether these pictures still had any meaning if, in spite of everything, through some intentional or accidental nuclear or environmental disaster we succeed in bringing human history to an end.

His response was immediate and clear: These are still valid pictures of the end of the world. God is God, and God's purpose for creation will prevail despite everything. But in the same breath he warned of two dangers:

1) This can't be said in any way that minimizes human responsibility for the world. Those who respond in faith to the promise that God will finally bring history to a worthy conclusion cannot say, "We don't have to try too hard at it, for after all God will finally bring everything out all right."

2) Whoever says that these are still valid pictures of the end of the world is then responsible to say what he or she means, and this is difficult or impossible to do. It is simply impossible in any conceptual way. We don't know what we mean by this, and should not claim that we do. At the end of the day, at the end of the book, even if that book is the Bible, there is still no closure.

[20] Ex. 3:1-15.

[21] The καταπαύω/κατάπαυσις vocabulary of Hebrews' Sabbath symbolism is entirely missing (10 times in Hebrews).

[22] Though the schema of seven concluding scenes is affirmed by a number of scholars, it is challenged by, e.g., Gerhard Krodel, who declares as his tenth principle of understanding John's composition: "We should not construct cycles of sevens where John did not number his visions" (*Revelation* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989] 60). While my own understanding of John's structure postulates several sevens not explicitly numbered by John, my present point depends not on there being exactly seven concluding scenes, but on there being a plurality.

the end, it is logically more satisfying to fit them together into an integrated chronological series. John does not do this either. He inherited a fairly tight apocalyptic chronological scheme, but he both loosens the connections between the individual scenes and makes them more disconsonant with each other than in prior tradition.[23] Each picture portrays some aspect of the meaning of the end of history as such. They are not parts of the end-time drama in which each is related to the other as chronological elements of one super concluding series.

Revelation is meticulously structured, but not mechanically so. Revelation's structure is not random. John communicates his visionary message as more than a "kaleidoscope of images."[24] John specifically calls attention to several literary designs, especially his heptadic patterns, but also has numerous heptads to which he does not call attention.[25] One of these is the final

[23] Jewish eschatology and apocalyptic had developed a relatively firm traditional chronology for the last events leading to the New Jerusalem, based on Ezekiel 37-48 (see William W. Reader, *Die Stadt Gottes in der Johannesapokalypse* [D. Theol. diss., University of Göttingen, 1971] 38-39 and preceding). Though John is influenced by this tradition, of which traces remain, he has weakened the chronological links in order to let each scene speak for itself. Some examples that illustrate the difficulty of attempting to understand these seven scenes as a diachronic series arranged in a tight chronology follow:

In 19:19-21 (scene 2) the kings of the earth are destroyed and devoured; in 20:9 (scene 5) they are destroyed (again!) by fire from heaven, while in 21:24 they bring their glory into the New Jerusalem, and in 22:2 the nations are healed (scene 7).

In 20:11 (scene 6) the earth and heaven try in vain to flee, whereas in 21:1 (scene 7) they are in fact gone.

After the devil is bound and locked in the abyss in 20:2, the following μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτόν is without precedent in the tradition, has no rationale that would correspond to a linear, tight chronology, and is there only to prohibit 20:1-2 from being the sole picture of the end, i.e., to facilitate the introduction of more pictures.

The following picture of the millennium, 20:4-6, is traditionally part of a series. As is well known, the idea of a temporary interregnum developed as a combination of the this-worldly prophetic eschatology in continuity with history and the other-worldly apocalyptic eschatology in discontinuity with it, resulting in the series this age/messianic kingdom/the age to come (cf. *1 Enoch* 91:12-19; 93:1-14; *Sib. Or.* 3:652ff.; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 30; 40:3; 74:2; *4 Ezra* 7:28ff.; 12:34; *b. Sanh.* 99a; and perhaps 1 Cor. 15:23-28). But if the millennial kingdom were part of a series, and if the martyrs were the exclusive participants in that kingdom, one must ask what special reward they are supposed to receive if they must wait a thousand years for the true bliss of the New Jerusalem. In John's hands, the millennial scene makes theological sense only as *a* picture of one aspect of *the* final scene, not as an interim link in a chain of eschatological events. The sense is synchronic, not diachronic.

[24] Bauckham (*Theology*, 150) and Caird (*Revelation*, 13, 15) use the "kaleidoscope" metaphor repeatedly.

[25] Explicitly, seven *churches* (2-3), *seals* (6:1–8:1), *trumpets* (8:2–11:15), and *bowls* (15:1–16:21). But cf. also seven kings (17:9-11). There are several patterns of seven to which John does not call attention, such as seven beatitudes (1:3, 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). Cf. my list (M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* [Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989] 31-32), and see now Bauckham's amazing statistics (*Theology*, 66, 109). That this pattern persists even into the details of the description of the New Jerusalem is seen, for example, in Caird's observation of the seven things absent from the

act of the drama of history, which John divides into seven scenes without enumerating them.[26] Some of John's patterns are not architechtonically neat, but intentionally tensive.[27] John's seven pictures of the end are such a tensive structure that resists closure. They cannot be combined into a single picture. Nor can any one picture be understood in isolation.[28]

To understand them in context means that these concluding scenes must be understood within the structure of Revelation as a whole.[29] Revelation has three parts. Part one is the series of seven messages to the churches in seven cities of Asia, introduced by a scene of the transcendent glory of Christ (1:9–3:22). Part two is comprised of God's victory over and judgment on the great city Babylon, introduced by the vision of the heavenly throne of God and Christ, and concluding with a lamentation for the destruction of the harlot city Babylon. Part three presents the sevenfold picture of the end, culminating in the descent of the bride city, New Jerusalem, again preceded by a transcendent scene of celebration and praise to the God who judges and reigns as king.

The final literary unit thus embraces 19:1–22:5. It is especially important to see each of the seven pictures in conjunction with the other images in John's concluding collage. I will comment on each picture briefly, then (like John) elaborate only the last one.

VI. Revelation 19:1–22:5

Introduction: The Heavenly Worship (19:1–10)[30]

The final scenes are set in the context of transcendent praise to God. George Frideric Handel had a fine instinct for the movement of Revelation

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New Jerusalem (*Revelation*, 262). Even if the discovery of some sevens represents too much scholarly enthusiasm about a valid point, there are far too many heptads to which John does not call attention to be coincidental.

[26] There is no unanimity on the outline of Revelation. Several scholars, however, concur on the heptadic structure of Revelation 19-22. Cf., e.g., Paul Minear, *New Testament Apocalyptic* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981) 115-125; Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Apocalypse (Revelation)," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) 1014-1016. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza regards 19:11–22:9 as the final unit, and lists seven scenes in this composition without calling attention to the heptadic structure (*The Apocalypse* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1976] 37).

[27] John twice announces a series of three woes, and *post facto* indicates when each of the first two is over. But where is the third woe? Cf. 8:13; 9:1, 12; 11:14; 12:12.

[28] It is thus just as misguided to focus on the millennium or the last judgment as discrete scenes as to isolate Benjie on the balcony.

[29] This is not merely a general exegetical platitude. John specifically relates the closing pictures of the New Jerusalem to his opening exhortations to the churches, for example (e.g., 2:7 is recalled in 21:7; 22:2, 14, 19; and 21:2 harks back to 3:12). For a discussion and rationale for this structure, see my *Revelation*, 28-35, and cf. the outline appended to this article.

[30] This scene is sometimes taken to go with the preceding (cf., e.g., Caird's peculiar demarca-

in choosing words from this scene as the climax of the *Messiah*. God has always and everywhere been de jure king of his own creation. At the eschaton, God acts to make his kingship de facto. But this is first celebrated and sung about before it is ever pictured. The perspective of his communication is Godward in praise, not turned toward the reader or the future in some speculative, informational sense.

1. The Return of Christ (19:11-16)

At the end of history we meet the crucified Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the one who exercises the judgment of God. He is the one who exercises the kingly power of God. He is not a newcomer who finally arrives at the end of history. We have seen him before in this vision (19:12 // 1:14). And this one is the one who has already been with us in history, the one who was himself faithful unto death, designated by the same name as that of his faithful martyr on earth ("Faithful and True" [19:11 // 3:14; cf. 2:13]). He is the powerful one, riding on a war horse, the one who represents the ultimate power of God, the one who has revealed that the ultimate power of the universe is the suffering, self-giving love of God, the one who has redefined what it means to conquer, the one whose power can only be misunderstood and misrepresented by war and violence.[31] If we had only this one picture of the end, it would say: at the end of history we do not meet a stranger, but the one who has already been among us and revealed what history is all about.

2. The Last Battle (19:17-21)[32]

Battle imagery is used throughout the Bible to portray God's struggle against evil. Here, the last battle is fought and evil is definitively destroyed.

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tion of this section, making 18:20–19:4 a unit, with a major division between 19:4 and 19:5 [*Revelation*, 227-233]). It is true that the parallel between Whore Babylon and Bride New Jerusalem creates contacts between the judgment of the harlot city just described and the advent of the reign of God and the wedding celebration in the New Jerusalem to be described. But that a new major section begins here is indicated by the combination μετὰ ταῦτα and φωνή found only here and in 4:1, which plays the same structural role for part two as this scene does for part three (cf. outline). Thus the opening of heaven (4:1//19:11) and the rider on the white horse (6:1//19:11) have analogous places in the literary structure. Further, 19:9-10, John's attempt to worship the angel, relates this scene to the following sevenfold unit, which likewise concludes with this strange interchange between John and the angel in 22:8-9. Just as 1:9-10 and 4:1–5:14 set the scenes that follow in the context of transcendent worship, so 19:1-10 places the following scenes in the setting of the heavenly liturgy.

[31] The figure on the white horse of the first seal in 6:1-2 "conquers" using the human means of power, military force, and violence, and is thus only a pale imitation of the true Rider, an instrument of God's penultimate judgment of the earth rather than its ultimate redemption.

[32] Though related to the preceding, these verses are a separate, discrete scene. It begins with

As the destroyers of the earth are destroyed, those who have devoured are here devoured. The transcendent (abstract) evil powers behind them are themselves destroyed. While the picture is of incredible violence, the only "weapon" is not a literal sword, but the sword that proceeds from the mouth of the King. If we had only this picture of the end, it would say: the word of the King that seems so fragile will ultimately prevail, and the evil we see all about us and within us will finally be defeated and utterly consumed. The imagery itself is ghastly; the mood is festive, because the final victory of God is here celebrated. We may draw back at the imagery; we may dare to join in the celebration.

3. The Binding of Satan (20:1-3)[33]

"The nations" are not inherently evil. They are deceived by a transcendent power of evil. The nations that rebel against their creator, that abuse the people of God and the meek of the earth, are not themselves our enemies. If the devil could somehow be arrested, these nations could be friends with each other and with us. But although already defeated in the heavenly world (12:7-12), the devil still ranges unbridled throughout this world, for the time being doing his devilish work of perverting the creation and deceiving the nations. It shall not always be so. Among our pictures of hope, one that could perhaps become more meaningful than pearly gates and golden streets is that of a large angel with a lasso and a determined look.

4. The Thousand-Year Reign (20:4-6)

These three verses have received more than their share of attention.[34] For John they are indeed one way of picturing the eschatological triumph of God. But we might first note how little is said. John refuses to elaborate. For him, the scene communicates one conviction: Christ shall ultimately reign on *this* earth, and his faithful people shall reign with him. This world, this creation, gets to have a thousand-year, undemonized celebration, and

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καὶ εἶδον, as do six of the seven scenes. Verses 17-18 and 21 form a bracket, the first being the "invitation" and the last the "meal."

[33] This scene too, though related to what follows, is a separate picture. The motif of the eschatological binding of Satan is found elsewhere as a discrete theme, a picture of the end not part of a chronology but complete in itself (cf. Mk. 3:26-27). Verse 3 already comes to a conclusion and tells what "must" be afterwards, making vv. 1-3 a unit. The repeated καὶ εἶδον of v. 1 and v. 4 marks off the intervening scene as a unit (six of the seven scenes begin with καὶ εἶδον, all except scene 5 [20:7]).

[34] It is unfortunate that the apocalyptic hope is frequently labeled "millennarianism."

the martyrs, the faithful people of God, participate in it.[35] They reign as kings; they serve as priests. To ask over whom they reign and to whom they serve as priests is the same category of question that inquires after the whence of Cain's wife.[36] The picture is complete in itself. It is a great picture, and a final one. If we had only this one picture of the end, we might affirm that its meaning is that the kingdom of God shall indeed come on earth as it is in heaven, and the prayer of all Jesus' disciples of all the ages shall be answered.

5. Satan's Last Stand: Gog and Magog (20:7-10)

A biblical picture burned deep into the consciousness of Israel portrays the people of God in the holy city on the mountain, surrounded by the evil hosts on the plain (Ezekiel 38-39; cf. Psalms 46; 48; 78; 87). This paradigmatic picture is here projected on a cosmic screen. The foe is now the *dragon*, the archenemy of God and God's people from earliest times, and the threatening armies are not merely the oppressor Gentile nations, but Gog and Magog, those quasi-mythological nations that lurk at the edge of the world. Their numberless hordes, deceived for the last time by Satan, surround the camp of the saints, but are destroyed by the act of God alone, and the dragon, the ultimate power of evil, is thrown into the abyss of ultimate destruction. If we had only this picture of the end, it would say: at the end of history God will destroy the transcendent enemies of the holy people of God. But this scene, like scenes two and three, portrays only the assertion of God's power against the enemy. It has no place for the sorting of the people of God themselves.

6. The Last Judgment (20:11-15)

If these scenes were not so terribly grim, there could be some humorous aspects in the way they are pictured (as in the angel with the chain). When the great white throne of the final judgment appears, the sight is so overwhelming that the universe (tried to) flee—but if you're the universe, where

[35] It must be noted that "only" those who have been beheaded for Jesus' sake share in the millennium. But in John's picture, this simply means those who have been faithful to Christ, i.e., the faithful people of God. To press the question of whether John in fact expected every single Christian to be martyred (more precisely, beheaded) is to mistake the genre of Revelation.

[36] A faulty kind of objectifying leads to having to describe the millennium (which John, of course, does not do—it is not that kind of language), and having to fit it into a chronology. The whole issue of "pre-," "post-," and "amillennial" schemes is thus misguided, imposing an alien frame of reference on the picture. If this is done anyway (since John does have something of a "chronology," but one that only links the separate scenes together loosely), then John might be described as "premillennial."

are you going to *go?* But there was no place to hide (cf. 6:14-16), and the sea reluctantly still there in 20:13 was to give up its dead. Everyone is there before the final judgment, the small and the great, and the great final sorting out of this world, so presently mixed up, is finally made. The criterion of judgment is as clear as it can be. Books are opened, and people are judged not by what they have claimed or claimed to believe or what they have really believed, but according to what they have done. Here we have a judgment according to works, a picture that holds me accountable. These books are the books of justice. But another book is there, the book of life, and those who are saved from sharing the fate of Death and Hades in the lake of fire are those whose names are in the book of life—names that were written there not on the basis of our works, but written "from the foundation of the earth" (17:8; cf. 3:5; 13:8). This book is the book of grace. All people are judged on the basis of what is written in the books. That is, we are judged on the basis of who we are and what we have done, and we are utterly and inescapably responsible. We are judged on the basis of who God is and what God has done; God is utterly and inescapably sovereign. When the imagery of this scene is reduced to discursive language, it resists reduction to logical, conceptual harmony. It is not only the case that the plurality of final scenes creates conceptual tensions that present end without closure. There are elements within each scene that withstand our efforts to understand them as steno-symbols[37] and reduce them to neat and consistent propositions. This is supremely the case with the seventh scene, the final scene of the New Jerusalem.

7. *The New Jerusalem (21:1–22:5)*

John's picture of the New Jerusalem is the last and most extensive of his eschatological pictures. Its concluding position does not indicate it is an afterthought, a new item at the end of the story, for it is not merely the concluding scene of a series, but has been woven into the composition throughout.[38] As John pictures God the Creator having the New Jerusalem in mind before the creation of the world, so John the author has it in mind as the goal of his composition from the very first. The goal of God's creation and the struggle of the aeons and centuries of cosmic and human

[37] On the distinction between steno-symbols and tensive symbols, see Philip E. Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).

[38] Cf., for example, the anticipatory allusions to the New Jerusalem in the messages to the seven churches in chapters 2-3: 2:7//21:7; 22:2, 14, and 19; 3:5//21:27; 3:12//21:2; 3:21//22:3.

history is also the goal of John's composition that he has had in mind from the very first.

John's portrayal of the New Jerusalem is a tensive symbol, not a steno-symbol. I am not here calling our attention to the disparities between the concluding scene in Revelation and pictures of the end elsewhere in the same composition.[39] I am rather talking about tensions within the last picture itself. History and the universe do not achieve a homeostasis, but can be portrayed only by means of pictures with built-in tensions.

It is doubly surprising to find the goal of history pictured as a city. In the first place, John sees what is wrong with the world as summed up in its greatest city, so that one has every right to expect that after Babylon/Rome is destroyed in the eschatological judgment, the evil of the big city will be gone forever. In the second place, eschatological bliss must be the recovery of primitive bliss, and the primeval paradise was not a city. First there was the unspoiled garden, where God walked with humanity in the cool of the day. Then came the great disruption, and the first city was built outside the garden in the violent ambiguity of history, by Cain, the first murderer. Human fantasies of escape from the evil and terror of history have often been expressed as a going back, whether as an individualistic time-machine trip prior to our mistakes, or a collective cyclic myth of the eternal return. Thus modern quests for utopia, whether in myth, imagination, or practice, have been symbolized by anti-city pictures, whether it be nineteenth-century romanticist Europe's fascination with Arcadia, or the American longing for the virgin wilderness and the frontier, as in Daniel Boone's continuing quest for elbow room and Thoreau's drifting on Walden Pond. Many Greeks of John's day sought flight from the terror of history.[40] They considered the ideal to be Olympus, the Elysian Fields, not a renewed or restored glory of Athens.

Such fantasies are not theologically neutral. The longing to get back prior to the ambiguities and corruptions of civilization represents a rejection of creation and history, a refusal to understand ourselves as creatures whose irreversibly linear, fragmentary, and finite historical existence is the

[39] For example, the glassy sea present in the heavenly world of 4:6 represents the conquest and domestication of all the anticreation forces symbolized by the sea, but there is no sea at all in the new heaven and new earth of 21:1, a different way of picturing the absolute and final victory over the abysmal font of all the evil that infects the world. Another example: faithful Christians are pillars in the eschatological temple (3:12), but there is no temple in the New Jerusalem (21:22).

[40] Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954) 139-162.

gift of the God of time and history. Jewish apocalypticism became a vehicle of the dogged biblical faith that held on to the world as the creation of the good God and history as the arena of God's redemptive activity. Salvation is not a going back before what is, an abolition of the past that begins afresh so that this time we can "do it right," but a redeeming of what we have done. There is no going back to Eden, but Eden is brought forward to the end of history, and becomes a central park in the redeemed city, complete with tree of life and water of life.[41] Even after the exile, rebuilding of the walls and temple, and the recovery of some autonomy so that the earthly historical Jerusalem existed as a thriving city, Jewish eschatology and apocalyptic spoke of the fulfillment of God's purpose at the end of history as a renewed Jerusalem. When John incorporates paradise into the New Jerusalem, he is in step with the theological convictions of Jewish apocalypticism and its affirmation of the world and history. The goal of history is not an individualistic and anticultural "back to nature," but community, life together; not self-contained monads, but Theopolis. Nor is John the only New Testament theologian to utilize the eschatological image of the city.[42]

The city that descends to earth at the end of history is not a Platonic ideal previously uncontaminated by associations with this fallen world. The eschatological city bears the name of a particular city that already has a (sometimes sordid) this-worldly history. Its gates are named for the twelve tribes of Israel and its foundations bear the names of the twelve apostles. Each set of twelve belongs, sometimes conspicuously, to this fallen world. Tribes and apostles are not named after some heavenly archetype. Rather, the movement is in the opposite direction: the *eschatological* city bears the names of the *historical* people of God, Israel and the church. By calling this city "Jerusalem," John affirms that biblical history is continued and redeemed, just as Jerusalem included the history of pre-Israel Canaan, the history of the enemy nations, brought forward and redeemed. By calling the city *New* Jerusalem, John does not abolish the old, but fulfills it.[43] God the

[41] The *Endzeit/Urzeit* motif was of course not new with John, but stock apocalyptic. But Jewish apocalyptic typically understood the end time to be the fulfillment of history, not its abolition, often pictured the end as the advent of the preexistent New Jerusalem with paradisiacal motifs, and occasionally made this combination explicit (*T. Dan* 5:12-13; 4 Ezra 8:52). It was not typical to include the tree of life and water of life in the eschatological city. John has the most elaborate and specific such combination. *Including the paradisiacal tree of life and water of life in the New Jerusalem is distinctive of John.* Cf. Reader, *Stadt Gottes*, 30; and Cynthia Deutsch, "The Transformation of Symbols: The New Jerusalem in Rv 21:1–22:5," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 78 (1987) 117-118.

[42] Cf. Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:10; 12:22; 13:14.

[43] "New" is not a relative term, but an absolute one. It cannot have a comparative, "newer." Just

eschatological Renewer does not "make all new things," but "makes all things new." All that was worthwhile and salvageable in the old city of human striving is taken up into eternity and redeemed.

John finds considerable triumphalistic imagery in his Bible and his tradition. Yahweh is king and shall someday establish his kingdom over all peoples. God's people will share in the coming victory of God, which means they shall participate in God's reign by reigning themselves. This is sometimes pictured in terms of other peoples' being brought into the final kingdom as servants of the benevolent despots, eschatological Israel.[44]

Revelation explicitly adopts and affirms this triumphalistic imagery. God is the eschatological king, and ὁ νικῶν is a central designation for Jesus, the One through whom God's eschatological kingship is realized. The concluding part three of Revelation begins with the acclamation, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns," and concludes with the picture of the redeemed as those who "will reign forever and ever" (19:6; 22:5). There is thus a sense in which the New Jerusalem is a triumphalistic picture.

But the church receives a doubly transforming vision of the nature and meaning of this coming triumph of God. Along with pictures in which the deceived and disobedient nations are defeated and destroyed (19:15; 20:9), John has pictures of the nations as won over, so that God's triumph means the eschatological conversion of the nations, not their destruction or even their subjugation. John resists the "now-it's-our-turn" kind of liberation theology, of which one should always ask, "Who will save us from the liberators and from the oppressed now become oppressors?"

By a deformation of language comparable to speaking of "win/win" situations, John speaks of a final kingdom in which all the redeemed reign with God and Christ. But βασιλεύσουσιν is here an intransitive verb, referring to the eschatological freedom of the children of God, requiring no subject people over whom they reign. The New Jerusalem is not the eternal establishment of oppressive hierarchy, but the final identification of theonomy and human freedom and autonomy.[45] By extrapolating a word from a lan-

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as the counterpart of "first" is "last" (not "second") and the counterpart of "alpha" is "omega" (not "beta") in 22:13, so the counterpart of "first heaven and first earth" of 21:1 is "new heaven and new earth," (not "second heaven and second earth"). "New" in such contexts means eschatologically renewed, not "new and improved" in the cultural sense. The New Jerusalem is not a beta version of historical Jerusalem, but the omega version, the ultimate goal of all things.

[44] Cf., e.g., Isa. 49:23: kings and queens shall come to you, bow down, and lick the dust of your feet. Even this triumphalistic picture is not for the glory of Israel, but is theocentric: "Then you will know that I am the Lord."

[45] Bauckham makes this point eloquently and convincingly (*Theology*, 140-143).

guage game where it functions only in conjunction with its opposite, and then universalizing it, John accomplishes a certain deformation of language necessary in speaking of ultimacy. Such language is referential, but is not objectifying in the sense that hard inferences can be made from it.[46] Just as win/win does not mean the abolition of winning, or "tie," which is the same as "nobody wins," so "reign" does not mean nobody rules, but that the freedom and style associated with kings and with God himself is now shared by all the creation. The eschatological victory of God means the nations are won over, are converted, and participate in God's reign with all the redeemed. All are included in ruling; there are no subordinates. To ask whom the redeemed rule over mistakes the genre of such language as inferential and objectifying, and belongs to the same category of question as, "Where did Cain get his wife?"

The *way* they are to be won is by the power of love that suffers even to death. Paradigmatically, this is manifest in the christological redefinition of winning executed by Jesus the paradigmatic conqueror who "conquered" by giving his life for others and being faithful to his confession even to death.[47] Without indulging in synergistic speculation, John pictures the followers of Jesus as themselves "conquerors" who participate in Jesus' victory and are themselves the instruments of Christ's winning over the nations.[48] Thus the ultimate triumph of Jesus and his people is the polar opposite of the kind of conquest embodied in the beast and imitated by John's opponents in the church.[49]

Following the lead of 2 Isaiah and Ezekiel, *all* the other pictures of the New Jerusalem have an important place for temple, cult, and separation of holy and profane.[50] In this common version of the eschatological city, the distinction between holy and common that the people of God, in obedience to God's command, have struggled so hard to maintain in this world will

[46] Cf. my discussion of analogous aspects of christological language, M. Eugene Boring, *Truly Human/Truly Divine: Christological Language and the Gospel Form* (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1984) 91-134.

[47] Cf. my elaboration of this point in *Revelation*, 108-111.

[48] Cf. Bauckham, *Theology*, 84-104, especially his exegesis of 11:11-13 and 15:2-4.

[49] The Beast = Rome understands conquest in terms of hierarchy, power, and subjugation. John's opponents in the church are "Nicolaitans" and "Baalamites" who understand rule and conquest in a way that reflects the values and presuppositions of the culture rather than the reorientation (repentance, μετάνοια) of Christian faith. A popular etymology understood both Nicolaitan and Baalam to mean "ruler of the people."

[50] Ezekiel 40-48; Isa. 60:7, 13; Zech. 14:20-21; *Jub.* 1:17, 27-28; 2Q24; 5Q15 1:3-4; *T. Dan* 5:9; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 6:7-11; 59:4, 9; *Sib. Or.* 3:718-726, 772-776; 5:422-423. Cf. Reader, *Stadt Gottes*, from whom these references come.

finally be established forever. John's first predication about the New Jerusalem is that it is the holy city. But in scandalous and mind-warping imagery analogous to win/win language and all-are-kings terminology, John's vision of the New Jerusalem abolishes the distinction between sacred and profane, has no temple, and declares that all the redeemed are priests.

Though there is no temple, all will be priests.[51] This is not an objectifying image from which hard inferences may be made. To call all the redeemed "priests" is a way of picturing the closeness and intimacy with God enjoyed by priests in the temple, from which "outsiders" who loved to visit the temple and worship were excluded. Psalm 84 expresses this piety and this longing. To ask who are the laity for whom the redeemed are priests would again be to misconstrue the nature of the language.[52] As is the case with "kings" above, such language is self-related, not externally related. "Priests" pictures the quality of life of those holy people who constantly dwell in God's courts and enjoy his presence; it is not a word describing their relation to others, since there are no others.

Perhaps the most significant symbol of the New Jerusalem is the tensive picture of a *walled* city with *no shut gates.* A secure city by definition was walled. The function of a wall was to shut some in and shut others out; without a wall there could be neither insiders nor outsiders. The image of the wall characterizes the inhabitants of the eschatological holy city as insiders, and some phrases point to their belonging to the elect group of the holy people of God.[53] If John had wanted to portray a nondialectic final picture in which all are included, he could have envisioned a city without a wall or with walls that had been broken down.[54] But the eschatological city has a wall as an integral and elaborated part of the vision. Yet just as "holy"

[51] To be sure, the inhabitants of the holy city are not specifically designated priests. Neither the noun ἱερεύς nor the verb ἱερεύω is found in scene 7 portraying the New Jerusalem. That John thinks of those who "reign" with him as both kings and priests is clear, however, from Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6.

[52] Caird uncharacteristically takes this too literally and in too objectifying a manner (*Revelation*, 255).

[53] 21:27: Nothing common enters the holy city. No one who practices abomination or lying can enter it, but *only* those written in the Lamb's book of life. Yet while marking off the special character of "insiders," this statement does not posit actual unclean outsiders who continue to practice abomination and lying after the advent of the holy city. On the other hand, 22:15 represents the other dimension of the dialectic, and does characterize actual outsiders. Yet even here one might think of the priestly character of the redeemed, and of the open gates, so this is not necessarily the final picture of the "outsiders." One must also remember that 22:15 is not included as a part of the description of the future holy city but is in the admonitions directed to the present, in which there *are* profaners and liars aplenty.

[54] Cf. Eph. 2:14 and the temple wall.

no longer requires "profane" in order to point to the holy nature of the city, so "insider" no longer needs "outsider" in order to point to the character of the people of God. The picture is dialectic and tensive. There is no closure, either on the "inclusive" or "exclusive" side of the dialectic. There is a wall, but it is breached by gates bearing the names of the historical elect people of God, and these gates are always open, so that the kings and (Gentile) peoples of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Such picture language cannot be reduced to the neatness of discursive language. Efforts to do so inevitably fail to do justice to the dynamism of the picture.

In particular, the undialectic proposition that John teaches that salvation is limited to faithful Christian believers misses the ultimately inclusive thrust of John's picture. Much of Christian orthodoxy, in the train of Augustine but often without his profundity, has offered logical arguments against the ultimate salvation of all.[55] Such theology apparently needs the doctrine of endless punishment of the damned, or at least less than universal salvation, in order to make the whole system function, since it gets more uptight over the suggestion that there are biblical affirmations of universal salvation than over many other subjects.[56] Revelation lacks the clarity and closure of either the universalist or particularist positions. There are both pictures of the ultimate salvation of everything and everyone, *and* pictures of the damnation of the unfaithful. One aspect of the tensiveness of John's final scene is that he mixes elements from both kinds of pictures in his description of the New Jerusalem.[57] The dominant element is salvation for all; ultimately, all are at least potentially insiders.[58] Still, the picture lacks the closure that would be provided either by an undialectic universalism or by an ultimate dualism.

[55] Augustine *City of God* 21.10-27.

[56] The insistence that Revelation does not "teach" universal salvation is not confined to fundamentalists such as John F. Walvoord in "The Literal View," in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) 11-35 or even to such evangelicals as Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977) 277, 282,287-290, 304. Even Bauckham wants to be clear that John does not teach the salvation of every individual soul (*Theology*, 139), contra his nonobjectifying and dialectic hermeneutical principle advocated elsewhere (e.g., pp. 93, 104, 108, 137).

[57] I have elaborated the point with reference to Paul's theology in "The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986) 269-292, and for the Apocalypse in an excursus in *Revelation* ("Universal Salvation and Paradoxical Language," 226-232).

[58] The point is not marginal or incidental, but is made explicit by John's reinterpretation of traditional imagery. Thus Ezekiel's picture of trees in the New Jerusalem that provide fruit for eating and leaves for healing becomes healing *for the nations* (Ezek. 47:12//Rev. 22:2), and the traditional singular "people" is changed to "peoples" in 21:3. "He who was never the God of Israel only is not prepared to be the God of Christians only" (Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993] 210).

VII. Ethics and Responsibility

Ethics and human responsibility is properly a key dimension of this Symposium on apocalyptic language. I have not discussed it yet, not because I am not interested, but because it seems to me that to mention it too soon is not to listen to the text, but to replace it with our own priorities. If our political and social concerns become the filter through which we hear the text, we may not hear its concerns at all, but replace them with our own agenda.[59] John must be allowed to speak first. Exegesis has as its task clearing a space in our world for the message of the text to be heard.

Just as the interpreter should avoid premature translation of the songs, poetry, and surrealistic visions of Revelation into the prosaic concepts of discursive language, so the translation of John's visions into ethical perspectives and imperatives should not be the first item on the agenda.

But the ethical implications of taking the visions of the Apocalypse seriously are very important, especially in a time when apocalyptic is often regarded as escapist literature. It is thus inappropriate to attempt to reduce the visionary communication of Revelation to a list of rules or principles. I will venture only four theses, each directed against the misunderstanding of Revelation as cutting the nerve of responsible ethical action. No one of them, nor all of them together, are intended to summarize or replace the vision itself.

1. *At the heart of the universe is the self-giving love of God, made manifest and real in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This life is to be made manifest in Christ's people.* The Lion of Judah who became a Lamb is the central christological image of Revelation (4:1–5:14). The Messiah is the paradigm for the life of the Messianic community. As he "conquered," that is, gave his life for others in faithfulness to God (5:5; 17:14), so will they (2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7). As he was the faithful witness (1:5; 3:14), so are they (2:13). All ethical decisions must reflect this cross-shaped perspective on being God's people in the world.

2. *Since the world is God's creation, is loved by God and will be redeemed, Christians are called to love the world and participate in its redemption.* This thesis represents the theology of Revelation, which is only penultimately

[59] Neither am I claiming to be without concerns of my own, ethical and otherwise, which I bring to the text. "Let him without an agenda cast the first stone" (N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 122). It is precisely because our own proper concerns bring us to the text in the first place that we must exercise as much care as possible to hear the concerns of the biblical text.

dualistic but ultimately monistic, monotheistic, and God-centered. The world as God's creation is a major theme of Revelation. Those who "destroy the earth" violate God's creation and will receive God's judgment (11:28). The destiny of the world is not to be destroyed but renewed. To speak of the Apocalypse as antiworldly or other-worldly is a gross misunderstanding. It is the apocalyptists who held on to their faith in the one God who loves the world, in the face of all the evidence to the contrary. Biblical apocalyptic is an affirmation of the world as God's creation, and all responsible Christian ethical decision making must be within that framework.[60]

3. *The future of the world is portrayed in the concluding pictures of Revelation. Since they reveal in advance the ultimate destiny of the world, they give direction for the life of the people of God in the present, without providing specific rules for concrete cases.* Revelation functions best in giving us ethical directives not by providing us with a specific catalogue of imperatives or even a list of "principles," but by providing a nondiscursive collection of pictures of God's future for the world. Those who both study the original message of Revelation in its own historical setting and read it as scripture that mediates God's word for the present will come away with images of where the world is going. For example, if New Jerusalem has the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (22:2), the contemporary reader must ask whether our present policies and actions contribute to healing the nations, or are out of step with God's ultimate purpose. Revelation does not give the modern reader specific rules for personal or social ethics, but a vision that must inform all our ethical decision making.

4. *The ultimate future is decided, but the Apocalypse affirms human responsibility and freedom, and functions as a call to action.* God will bring the world to a worthy conclusion. The future is decided because God is God. The New Jerusalem will descend from heaven, it will not rise, Babel-like, from our own efforts. But John's utilization of apocalyptic is not deterministic in the sense that it cuts the nerve of human responsibility. In this regard John fits the category of eschatology rather than a rigid apocalyptic scheme. William James' analogy of the cosmic chess player is illuminating

[60] The importance of this is not in the least diminished by the fact that John himself gives little concrete ethical instruction for people in other and later situations. In his situation, ὑπομονή, faithful endurance, was the chief virtue. The crisis of persecution that he saw dawning, the relative lack of political power possessed by the Christian community at the end of the first century, and his conviction that the age was hastening quickly to its end inhibited his spelling out a strategy for particular ethical responsibility in the political sphere. But even John does not call for resignation or passivity.

here.[61] Humanity, and each human being, sits before the cosmic chess board, with the Lord God Almighty as our partner/opponent. We are free and responsible to make whatever move we choose, and our moves shape the course of the game. God watches our move, and responds to it, always in the same way, with incalculable love. The Christian *eschatological* perspective says that God will ultimately win because God is God and we are human, and that God's victory is not our defeat, but the victory of us all. A purely *apocalyptic* perspective says that every move is predetermined, that freedom and responsibility are illusory, and that God will win on the forty-sixth move (or some such). In these terms, John is less "apocalyptic" than "eschatological." For him, and for biblical apocalyptic generally, the God who has decided the ultimate future leaves the immediate future open. Our decisions are open, and they matter. What they cannot do is nullify the ultimate decision of God, who triumphs without ever violating our freedom. We will be judged according to our deeds, by the things written in the books (we are free and responsible), but the names of the redeemed were written in the book of life before the foundation of the world (God is sovereign). In ethics too, the end is not a matter of closure.

VIII. Conclusions

If we resist the temptation to reduce John's tensive pictures to a neat closure, what is the significance of these tensions as such? They are much more than the unevenness caused by undigested sources or by displacements in the text.[62] John's literary skill and subtlety are shown by his arrangement of his whole composition and by his use of scripture.

1. *A matter of theological conceptuality.* The tensions in his final scene are both intentional and inherent in the subject matter. That is, John is aware that he is speaking of God and ultimacy, and is aware that the subject matter cannot be adequately expressed in nontensive pictures. John knows that his talk of the end is talk of God, and that God-talk resists neatness and closure.[63] Thus to speak of the end is to speak the same kind of shattered

[61] As adapted theologically by J. A. T. Robinson, *In the End God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 58-59, 72.

[62] While John most likely used sources and traditions, it was not in the scissors-and-paste method assumed by an older generation of source critics. For a thorough history and critique of the efforts to make sense of Revelation 21:1–22:5 in terms of source analysis, see Reader, *Stadt Gottes*, 40-67.

[63] Cf. 21:6: "I *am* the alpha and the omega" (Not "I *cause* it."). To speak of the end is to speak of God himself. The end is God, not just brought about by God. The awareness of this is one of the strengths of Robinson's *In the End God.*

language one uses in speaking of God. It was not a schema of creation that was there in the beginning, but God. It is not an apocalyptic doctrine that is there at the end, but God. In talking about the end, one has to decide whether to have neatness/closure or God. The author of 4 Ezra is an example of an apocalyptist who considers the apocalyptic schema to be more ultimate even than God. He can thus have a neat system with closure (a final dualism in which most of creation is irreparably lost). He resists believing this, but believes he must, and that God himself is subordinate to the system. He opts for neatness, with great hesitation and distress, because it never occurred to him that God transcended the apocalyptic scheme. John opts for God, and lives without neatness. Biblical apocalyptic springs the framework of the apocalyptic scheme because it—like all other schemata—is not adequate finally to contain God.[64]

2. *A matter of worship setting.* Since Revelation, including Revelation's picture(s) of the end, has God as its subject matter, the appropriate mode of communication and perception is that of worship. Prayer, praise, and theological affirmation are fused into one. The pictures and pronouncements of Revelation are all contained within a worship framework. The language of the Apocalypse is the language of worship.

Thus the role of the songs in Revelation is not incidental, nor are they typical of apocalyptic.[65] Nor are they only the explanatory songs of the Greek chorus. They serve not only to comment on the action, but to set the whole of the action within the heavenly liturgy. Although the message of Revelation is addressed to the churches, the action of Revelation takes place in the context of songs of praise addressed to God.

[64] Cf. Mk. 13:20, where God adjusts the apocalyptic timetable for the sake of the elect.

[65] To my knowledge, there is nothing comparable to the songs of the Apocalypse in earlier Jewish apocalyptic. A scanning of the indices of standard secondary works on apocalyptic reveals nothing under the heading of songs, singing, hymns, music, etc. The index to James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1983, 1985) lists a total of nine references to angels singing and the heavenly liturgy, all in *2-3 Enoch*, *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*. These are without content except for *3 Enoch*, which restricts the angelic songs exclusively to the Sanctus (derived from Isaiah 6). Other apocalyptic is devoid of actual songs. The apocalypse nearest in time and style to Revelation, 4 Ezra, not only contains no songs, it laments instead of celebrates. The only reference to singing in 4 Ezra is 10:22: "Our harp has been laid low, our song has been silenced, and our rejoicing has been ended; the light of our lampstand has been put out, the ark of our covenant has been plundered, our holy things have been polluted, and the name by which we are called has been almost profaned; our children have suffered abuse, our priests have been burned to death, our Levites have gone into exile, our virgins have been defiled, and our wives have been ravished; our righteous men have been carried off, our little ones have been cast out, our young men have been enslaved and our strong men made powerless." (The sole reference to singing praise in the entire book is 2:42, part of the later Christian introduction.)

We return to the scene from *The Graduate.* The novel by Charles Webb was mostly dialogue with a bit of narrative. When made into a film, the script writer or director added the songs of Simon and Garfunkel. Of course the characters in the story do not hear them, but for the viewer, the whole action is placed in the context of songs. The moviegoer cannot just see the action oblivious to the soundtrack, including the song in the background that offers Mrs. Robinson life and celebration because Jesus loves her more than she can know. To be sure, it doesn't make conceptual, linear sense, but the viewer in the theater must decide whether just to enjoy the story as entertainment or to take the songs seriously as pointing to a meaning beyond the surface of the narrative.

By adding the songs, John may be inviting the hearer/reader to understand this text not as a matter of making it conform to a coherent conceptual system, but to join, or not join, in the song in the background of the whole scene, "Hallelujah, the Lord God Omnipotent reigns."

Appendix

The Structure of Revelation

Letter Opening (1:1-8)

I. God Speaks to the Churches in the Cities (1:9–3:22)
   (Time: John's own time at the end of the first century)
   A. Transcendent Christ (1:9-20)
   B. Seven Messages (2:1-3:22)
      1. Message to the Church in Ephesus (2:1-7)
      2. Message to the Church in Smyrna (2:8-11)
      3. Message to the Church in Pergamum (2:12-17)
      4. Message to the Church in Thyatira (2:18-29)
      5. Message to the Church in Sardis (3:1-6)
      6. Message to the Church in Philadelphia (3:7-13)
      7. Message to the Church in Laodicea (3:14-22)

II. God Judges the "Great City" (4:1–18:24)
   (Time: John's immediate future at the end of the first century)
   A. Transcendent God/Christ (4:1–5:14)
   B. Seven Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls of God's Judgment (6:1–18:24)
      1. Opening the Seven Seals (6:1–8:1)
      2. Sounding the Seven Trumpets (8:2–11:19)
      3. Exposé of the Powers of Evil (12:1–14:20)
      4. Seven Last Plagues (15:1–16:20)
      5. Fall of Babylon (17:1–18:24)

III. God Redeems the Holy City (19:1–22:20a)
(Time: The ultimate future [near in John's perspective])
A. Transcendent God (19:1-10)
B. Seven Scenes of God's Ultimate Triumph (19:11–22:5)
1. Return of Christ (19:11-16)
2. Last Battle (19:17-21)
3. Binding of Satan (20:1-3)
4. Thousand-Year Reign (20:4-6)
5. Defeat of Gog and Magog (20:7-10)
6. Last Judgment (20:11-15)
7. New Jerusalem (21:1–22:5)
C. The Vision Ends (22:6-20a)
Letter Closing (22:20b-21)

Augustine's Thoughts on This World and Hope for the Next*

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"Solace of the Wretched, Not Rewards of the Blessed"
(*De Civitate Dei* XXII, 24)

In one of his most moving essays, "Looking Back on the Spanish War," George Orwell wrote: "The major problem of our time is the decay of the belief in personal immortality, and it cannot be dealt with while the average human being is either drudging like an ox or shivering in fear of the secret police."[1] Orwell's judgment, at once both obvious and profound, remains as true more than fifty years later as when it was written in 1942. If we believe in the possibility of survival after death in a happier environment, still more, if we hold with St Paul that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18), then our attitude to earthly life will inevitably differ fundamentally from that of the heathen "who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). In Augustine's words, in this life we are "like pilgrims on the way to our true fatherland,"[2] and if we endure hardships on the journey, we should accept them as part of the test of our determination to reach our goal. Equally, our attitude to the present world should be a pragmatic one. Although it is God's creation, and therefore in itself good, it is a lesser good, a good to be used, and not enjoyed for its own sake.[3] The world passes away; but we shall endure to all eternity, whether for good or for ill.

The contrast of this outlook with that commonly held in developed societies today is obvious. Whether or not individuals believe in a continued

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The following abbreviations are used in the notes of the article: CCL (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina); CSEL (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum); PL (Patrologia Latina).

[1] Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia and "Looking Back on the Spanish War"* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1966) 245.

[2] *De Doctrina Christiana* 1,4,4 (CCL 32,8); cf. *In Epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos Tr.* 1,5 (PL 35, 1981).

[3] *Doctr. Chr.* 1,3,3 (CCL 32, 8).

existence after physical death, the organization of life in modern secular communities is centered upon this world, with the intention of obtaining the maximum satisfaction in it, because of a general belief in extinction at the end. This should, and often does, make for selfishness; yet even in fallen human nature there remains an element of altruism, so that a notable feature of the second half of the twentieth Christian century has been the development of a concern for the preservation of the planet for future generations, with a consequent recognition of a need to restrain the greedier appetites of the present in the interest of those who are to come after. Perhaps because atheism is difficult for the human soul, some people go further than this, embracing the physical world in their concern and adopting an attitude that comes close to treating it as if it were a sentient being.[4] Indeed, there exist movements—admittedly few in number and eccentric in character—that seek to revive the nature religions of the ancient world, often attracting, by a kind of paradox, members who are themselves practitioners of modern technology.[5] Such cults are, however, essentially idiosyncratic and anomalous. In contrast, the common tendency in what Harvey Cox has called "the secular city," is to concentrate on the quality of life here and now, and to neglect any thought of either posthumous happiness or of care for the future. The pattern of such an outlook was forecast long ago by Aldous Huxley in his novel *Brave New World*—a work that has proved singularly prophetic in its general tendency, if not in its details.[6]

I. Augustine's Eschatological Orientation

To the outlook of the *Brave New World*, that of Augustine stands in complete contrast. Augustine is eschatological in his thinking and con-

[4] I have particularly in mind one of the Greenpeace pamphlets that I have encountered. There is a curious parallel here with Manichaean teaching; see below, note 54.

[5] See Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979) 24-38, 225-264, 368-372; and Jean Ritchie, *The Secret World of Cults* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1991) 177: "There are an estimated 250,000 witches and pagans living in Britain today. They are an ecologically-aware, nature-loving lot, listing Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth among the most popular organisations to belong to, reading the *Guardian* [a liberal, progressive and pro-abortion publication] more than any other newspaper (20 per cent.), choosing the Greens as their favourite political party, and listing reading as their most preferred pastime." Tanya M. Luhrmann (*Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989]) confirms Ritchie's picture of modern English witches being a middle-class, intellectual association. The coven in which she was initiated in 1984 included a computer consultant, a computer-software analyst, a teacher, an ex-Oxford university lecturer, an electronic engineer, a professional artist, a middle-ranking business manager, and the manager of a large housing estate (p. 49).

[6] More prophetic than Huxley's own later novel, *Ape and Essence* or George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. I tried, a quarter of a century ago, to discuss the matter in an article: "Divided Christendom: The Contemporary Background," *Sobornost*, ser. 5, no. 7 (1968) 511-525.

cerned, first and foremost, with the next world, even while leading a vigorous life in this. He never doubted the continuation of the soul after bodily death—a conviction that antedated his conversion to Catholic Christianity. He mentions in the *Confessions* that, while at Milan and before reading the Neoplatonic treatises that exercised so powerful an influence over his thoughts and desires, he had, in a discussion on the nature of the highest good and the highest evil, maintained that he would have considered Epicurus to be the best of philosophers, but for the fact that he himself was convinced of the survival of the soul after death and of posthumous accountability for our actions, which Epicurus denied.[7] There is no reason to doubt the reliability of this recollection, which indicates that, while Augustine most certainly did not, at that time, disparage earthly life on first principles, and appreciated its pleasures, he already held with the wise man "that for all these things God will bring you into judgment" (Eccl. 11:9). Such an understanding is confirmed by his subsequent theological career. As a Christian apologist Augustine was constrained, when arguing with the Manichees, to assert the goodness of the material world as God's creation, and in the concluding portion of chapter 24 of book XXII of *The City of God* he delivers an encomium on the beauty and utility of God's creation, only to employ it as a kind of indication of the true beauty of heaven and to ask rhetorically what the rewards of the blessed will be, if God has given such wonderful consolations to those whom he has predestined to eternal death.[8] In this passage one has a paradigm of Augustine's attitude. Temporal creation is good; but in respect of eternity it is nothing. When the seventeenth-century Scottish divine Samuel Rutherford, writing to Lady Kenmure on the death of a child, advised her: "Build your nest upon no tree here; for ye see God hath sold the forest to death,"[9] he was expressing a thoroughly Augustinian sentiment.

Such a theological tendency in Augustine's thought would only be encouraged by the influence of Neoplatonism, which long continued to affect his theologizing; for Platonism, with its notion of an ascent from the temporal to the eternal, a ladder of ascent in which the contemplative, as he mounts higher, kicks away the previous rung as being of no further value,

[7] *Confessionum Libri XIII* 6, 16, 26 (CCL 27, 90).

[8] *De Civitate Dei* 22, 24: "Et haec omnia miserorum sunt damnatorumque solacia, non praemia beatorum. Quae igitur illa sunt, si tot et talia ac tanta sunt ista? ... Quae bona in illo regno accepturi sumus, quando quidem Christo moriente pro nobis tale iam pignus accepimus!" (CSEL 40:2, 649).

[9] *Letters of the Rev. Samuel Rutherford,* rev. and ed. Thomas Smith (Edinburgh/London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1891) 373.

has ultimately—as Augustine recognized—no place for material images of spiritual realities.[10] Nevertheless, it is easy to exaggerate the Platonic influence in determining Augustine's thinking, as opposed to the Christian, even in the early years of his career as a Catholic Christian. Take, for example, the treatise *De Vera Religione*, composed in 390, a year before Augustine's ordination to the priesthood, which so profoundly changed the course of his life. There are, certainly, traces of Platonic influence in the *De Vera Religione*, but Augustine's concern, in a work that is directed against paganism, Judaism, and heresy—especially Manichaeism[11]—is to represent Catholic Christianity as *completing* the teaching of the philosophers by giving the power that enables both philosophers and more ordinary mortals to put philosophical principle into practice.[12] Indeed, Augustine has no hesitation in saying that, if the dead Platonists could come to life again, they would not need to make many changes in their beliefs in order to become Christians, "as many Platonists of more recent times have done,"[13] since philosophy and religion are now one and the same in Christianity.[14] In the *De Vera Religione*, which embraces themes that Augustine would subsequently develop in his more mature writings,[15] Augustine is perfectly clear about the doctrine of the Trinity,[16] of the Incarnation,[17] and of *creatio ex nihilo*.[18] The only major element of his later writing that is lacking is an emphasis on the

[10] This Platonic influence is still evident in the *De Vera Religione* 34, 63-64 (CCL 32, 228-229). See the remarks of Robert J. O'Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978) 89-90.

[11] Manichaeism imposed upon Augustine the necessity of admitting the goodness of God's creation; *De Vera Rel.* 5, 9; 9, 16; 20, 38 (CSEL 32, 193-194; 198; 210).

[12] *De Vera Rel.* 3, 3; 3, 5 (notice the echo of Tertullian *Apol.* 37); 6, 10: ". . . omnibus tamen gratiae dei participandae dat potestatem [ecclesia catholica]"; 12, 24 (CCL 32, 188-190; 191-192; 194; 202).

[13] Ibid. 4, 7: ". . . et paucis mutatis verbis et sententiis Christiani fierent, sicut plerique recentiorum nostrorum temporum Platonici fecerunt" (CCL 32, 192). Was Augustine here thinking in particular of Marius Victorinus?

[14] Ibid. 5, 8: ". . . non aliam esse philosophiam, id est sapientiae studium, et aliam religionem, cum hi, quorum doctrinam non approbamus, nec sacramenta nobiscum communicant" (CCL 32, 193).

[15] An obvious and particular example would be *Vera Rel.* 26, 49-27, 50 (CCL 32, 218-220), which anticipates the general theme of the *De Civ. Dei;* but the whole treatise contains similar anticipations, e.g., 39, 73: "Omnis ergo, qui utrum sit veritas dubitat, in se ipso habet verum, unde non dubitet, nec ullum verum nisi veritate verum est" (CCL 32, 235), prepares the way for the lapidary: "Si enim fallor, sum" of *Civ. Dei* 11, 26 (CSEL 40:1, 551) and 13, 26 (CCL 32, 203-204) and distinction between *frui* and *uti* of *De Doctrina Christiana* 3, 3-5, 5 (CCL 32, 8-9).

[16] *Vera Rel.* 7, 13; 14, 28; 16, 30; 55, 113 (CCL 32, 196-197; 204; 205; 259-260).

[17] Ibid. 8, 14 (CCL 32, 197).

[18] Ibid. 11, 21: "Nulla vita est, quae non sit ex deo, quia deus utique summa vita est et ipse fons vitae, nec aliqua vita, in quantum vita est, malum est, sed in quantum vergit ad mortem"; 18, 35-36 (CCL 32, 200; 208-209).

work of Christ, and on Christ as the mediator between man and God.[19] For Augustine at this stage still puts his emphasis on Christ as the supernatural Light "which enlightens everyone" (Jn. 1:9), which we seek, in approved Neoplatonic fashion, by entering into ourselves.[20] What, however, is significant for our purposes about the *De Vera Religione* is that in it Augustine, while accepting, as any Christian Platonist must accept, the superiority of permanence over mutability and of eternity over time, and the need to direct our minds and wills to the permanent and the eternal,[21] nevertheless does not simply reject the mutable and the temporal as being of no account, but sees them as evidence of the order and harmony of God's creation—a concept that he had already developed in the *De Ordine* of 386 and would further develop in the *De Civitate Dei*.[22] Throughout his Christian life Augustine retained an intellectual devotion to the concept of order, which included the temporal, created order but with an important qualification: within the temporal, created order mutability, as ordained by God, has a proper place, precisely because it changes and passes away. To cleave to it as if it were everlasting is simply perverse; hence:

> the reason why corporal beauty is the lowest beauty is that its parts cannot all exist simultaneously. Some things give place and others succeed them, and all together complete the number of temporal forms and make a single beauty. But all this is not evil because it is transient. A line of poetry is beautiful in its own way, though no two syllables can be spoken at the same time. The second cannot be spoken till the first is finished. So in due order the end of the line is reached.[23]

This aesthetic understanding of the transitory—which, of course, serves by contrast to emphasise the true beauty of the eternal[24]—was not confined to the *De Vera Religione*. In the *De Civitate Dei* XII, 4, Augustine is clear that the defects of lower created things—animals, trees, and the like—are not to be regarded as being in some way culpable, and therefore deserving of divine punishment, but simply as evidence of the will of the Creator,

[19] There are, however, traces in 16, 30; 16, 31; 35, 65 (CCL 32, 205-206; 206-207; 229-230).
[20] *Vera Rel.* 39, 72 (CCL 32, 234-235).
[21] Ibid. 3, 3; 4, 4; 46, 89; 49, 97; 52, 101 (CCL 32, 188-190; 192; 245; 248; 250; 252-253).
[22] See esp. book XIX, chaps. 12-14 (CSEL 40:2, 390-399).
[23] *Vera Rel.* 21, 41-22, 42 (CCL 32, 213). Translation by John H.S. Burleigh, *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 6 (London: S.C.M. Press; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953) 245.
[24] Ibid. 22, 43 (CCL 32, 213-214).

whose purpose is that they should bring to perfection the beauty of the lower parts of the universe by their alternation and succession in the passage of the seasons; and this is a beauty in its own kind, finding its place among the constituent parts of this world.[25]

Augustine's attitude is, of course, in complete contrast to that of generations of romantics, who have cried with Alphonse de Lamartine,

> O temps, suspends ton vol! et vous, heures propices
> Suspendez votre cours!
> Laissez-nous savourer les rapides délices
> Des plus beaux de nos jours!

On the contrary, for Augustine what is temporal must be recognised as temporal, appreciated as a good, but as a passing good, and not allowed to distract the Christian from the true Good, which is eternal.[26] There should be no purposeless and empty investigation of the wonders of nature, no vain and transient curiosity, but all our contemplation should be a step towards what is immortal and abiding.[27]

Such an attitude clearly does not justify that ruthless exploitation of nature from which contemporary environmentalists have recoiled so violently; but equally, it does not make for any undue concern for conservation. Far more important, in Augustine's eyes, than attempts to preserve the natural order that God has destined to pass away, is that the individual Christian should strive to discipline and amend his own life, should "suffer the stings of conscience upon his bed, should restore his spirit, should not love exterior vanities and seek lies" (Ps. 4:2, 4).[28] The "stings of conscience" were exemplified by Augustine in his own person on his deathbed, as recorded by his biographer, Possidius of Calama.

> God granted this holy man a long life for the benefit and felicity of Holy Church, and he lived seventy-six years, almost forty of them in the clerical estate or as a bishop; and he was accustomed to say in private conversation, that after the reception of baptism, even admired Christians—and even bishops!—ought not to go out from the body without

[25] *Civ. Dei* 12, 4 (CSEL 40:1, 571). Translation by Henry Bettenson, *St Augustine: Concerning the City of God against the Pagans* (London: Penguin Books, 1972) 475. Cf. *De Natura Boni* 8 (CSEL 25:2, 858).

[26] *Vera Rel.* 10, 19; 15, 29 (CCL 2, 199-200; 205).

[27] Ibid. 29, 52 (CCL 32, 221).

[28] Ibid. 34, 64 (CCL 32, 228-229).

adequate penitence.[29] And this he did himself in the final illness from which he died; for he caused those very few penitential psalms of David to be written out and fixed to the wall, and in the days of his illness he gazed upon the texts and read them, continually weeping many tears.[30]

Augustine's deathbed reveals another profound contrast between his outlook and that of the present age. Augustine wanted to make what our ancestors would have called "a good end," to meet death prepared and penitent, having (in the words of the printer of John Donne's *Deaths Duell*) "discovered the utmost of his power, the utmost of his crueltie." Today, many people—and these include some of religious convictions—when asked how they would wish to die, would answer, "in my sleep." Since we cannot generally determine the manner of our dying, this answer is not in itself unchristian; but it readily accords with a materialistic attitude towards death, as the end of our existence. For Augustine, death is a door to a future that will be determined, for good or ill, by God.[31] In the modern worldview it is the termination of a particular human consciousness. Accordingly, it is better to pass unknowingly into nonexistence than consciously to face extinction. For Augustine, it was otherwise. For him, as for John Henry Newman, physical death does not destroy the identity of those

> Whose spirits live in awful singleness,
> Each in its self-formed sphere of light or gloom.

Augustine never described precisely how he conceived of the state of the departed between death and the last judgment. He speaks of "secret storehouses" (*abditis receptaculis*) where their souls await the general resurrection, at rest or in affliction, according to their works.[32] Of the reality of that resurrection and of the judgment that was to follow, Augustine had no doubt—it was part of the faith of the church, enshrined in the creed: "He will come again as he ascended in a temporal dispensation, according to the authority spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles [1:11] and in the Apocalypse, where it is written: 'These things are said by him who is and who was and

[29] Augustine will discuss the question of post-baptismal sin and its consequences and remedies in *Enchiridion ad Laurentium* 17, 64-65 (CCL 46, 83-84); cf. *ench.* 22, 81-83 (CCL 46, 94-95) and *Civ. Dei* 21, 24; 27 (CSEL 40:2, 557-564; 573-584).

[30] Possidius *Vita Augustini* 31 (PL 32, 63). Translation mine.

[31] Aug. *Epistula* 199, 1, 2-3 (CSEL 57, 246-247); *ench.* 25, 99; 29, 112-113 (CCL 46, 102-103; 109-110).

[32] *ench.* 26, 109 (CCL 46, 108). See Heikki Kotila, *Memoria Mortuorum: Commemoration of the Departed in Augustine* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1992) 128-130.

who is to come' [Rev. 1:8]."[33] The reality of the resurrection and the last judgment for Augustine is made clear by his discussion of the physical characteristics of the resurrection body[34] and whether untimely births will rise again.[35] Furthermore, the new heaven and new earth seen by John (Rev. 21:1) come into being, not by the destruction of the earlier creation, but by its renewal:

> When the judgment has taken place, then the present heaven and earth will cease to be, as the new heaven and earth begin; but the present world will pass away by a change of state, and not by annihilation. Hence the Apostle says: "The form of this world is passing away, and I want you to be free from anxiety" [1 Cor. 7:31-32]. It is therefore the form which passes away, not the nature.[36]

Although Augustine does not labor the matter, his doctrine of transformation, not annihilation, is to be noted. His eschatology is catholic, not gnostic. The world, like humanity, is to be reformed, not destroyed.

II. Augustine's Attitude to the Created World

These considerations suggest that Augustine's attitude to the present order of creation is not as simple as might appear on first impressions. His desire to escape from the present, passing world was tempered, though hardly balanced, by a recognition of *some* value in the same passing world, and an apparently sincere appreciation of "the beauty and usefulness of created nature which God's generosity has given to man."[37] Augustine could even recognize the legitimate pleasure of mundane activities—Adam's horticultural labor in the garden of Eden was not burdensome, but enjoyable[38] and he observed that, in the present world, where fallen human beings eat bread by the sweat of their face (Gen. 3:19), there are some who still take

[33] *De Fide et Symbolo* 8, 15 (CSEL 41, 17); cf. *ench.* 14, 54 (CCL 46, 78); *Civ. Dei* 20, 14 (CSEL 40:2, 461).

[34] *Fid. et Symb.* 15, 24 (CSEL 41, 30-32); *ench.* 23, 84-92 (CCL 46, 95-99); *Civ. Dei* 22, 15-17 (CSEL 40:2, 623-626).

[35] *ench.* 23, 85 (CCL 46, 95-96); *Civ. Dei* 22, 13-14 (CSEL 40:2, 621-623).

[36] *Civ. Dei* 20, 14: "Peracto quippe iudicio, tunc esse desinet hoc caelum et haec terra, quando incipiet esse caelum novum et terra nova. Mutatione namque rerum, non omni modo interitu transibit hic mundus. Unde et apostolus dicit: *Praeterit enim figura huius mundi, volo vos sine sollicitudine esse* [1 Cor. 7:31-32]. Figura ergo praeterit, non natura" (CSEL 40:2, 461). Translation mine.

[37] Ibid. 22, 24: ". . . pulchritudo et utilitas creaturae, quae homini, licet in istos labores miseriasque proiecto adque damnato, spectanda adque sumenda divina largitate concessa est" (CSEL 40:2, 648).

[38] *De Genesi ad Litteram* 8, 10, 22 (CSEL 28: 1, 246-247).

such pleasure in agriculture that they are miserable if they have to do anything else.[39] Again, one cannot mistake the enthusiasm of Augustine's description of the joys of friendship in *Confessions* IV, viii, 13.

> To speak and laugh together; to perform mutual services for one another; to read well-written books together; sometimes to jest, at other times to be serious with one another; to disagree at times without bitterness, as a man does with himself; and to keep most of our discussions pleasant by the rarity of disagreement; to teach the others and to learn from them; to long for those absent with impatience, and to receive with joy those coming to us, to make but one out of many. These, and other most welcome expressions, proceeding from the beauty of those who loved and returned their friends' love by tongue, eyes, and a thousand pleasing gestures, were like fuel to set our minds on fire.[40]

Augustine was subsequently to discover that this human and passing love could be transformed into Christian friendship, which is not limited to this life,[41] and to experience it in anticipation in the communal life of the monasteries of Thagaste and Hippo.[42] As "the new heaven and the new earth" of Revelation 21:1 had grown out of those created in the beginning, and as the bodies of the saints were to rise from the dead and be glorified, so too would human affections be transformed within the communion of the saints. Indeed, for Augustine the boundary between created nature and nature redeemed was at once both fixed and undefined.

Accordingly, Augustine's attitude to the created world is not one of rejection, like the Gnostic's, but more ambiguous. He was never personally a thoroughgoing ascetic, like those who inhabited the deserts of Egypt and Syria. His monastic *Rule* is a moderate one that does not allow for exaggerated austerity, but prefers to lay its emphasis on the common life and the idea of having all things in common. By his own admission, Augustine enjoyed his food,[43] even though he was a vegetarian; and he always had wine on the episcopal table,[44] not sharing the view of the stern Egyptian, Appa

[39] Ibid. 8, 8, 15 (CSEL 28: 1, 243).
[40] *Conf.* 4, 8, 13 (CCL 27, 47). Translation mine.
[41] Ibid. 4, 9, 14 (CCL 27, 47).
[42] See Luc Verheijen, *Saint Augustine's Monasticism in the Light of Acts 4: 32-35* (n.p.: Villanova University Press, 1979); but cf. George Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 52-53.
[43] *Conf.* 10, 31, 43-47, esp. 45 (CCL 27, 177-180).
[44] Possidius *Vita Augustini* 22 (PL 32, 51-52).

Poemen, who declared that "wine is not for monks,"[45] and, on another occasion, "All bodily comfort is an abomination to the Lord."[46] Yet Augustine would certainly have agreed with Poemen when he declared: "We have not been taught to kill our bodies, but to kill our passions."[47] Augustine's apparently endless preoccupation with sexual concupiscence in his anti-Pelagian writings may seem to call this assertion into question; but his preoccupation seems (at least to the present writer) to be the result of a misunderstanding of human sexual physiology, which seemed to provide empirical support to his theory of original sin; and when Augustine is not actually riding his hobbyhorse of concupiscence, his attitude to sexuality is surprisingly reasonable, for he had none of the a priori hostility to marriage that characterises Jerome's attack on Jovinian. Indeed, Augustine's *De Bono Coniugali* seems to be a reply to Jovinian, affirming the acceptability of marriage as a Christian state of life, although one inferior to that of dedicated virginity, and avoiding the ferocity that marks Jerome's attempt to answer the heretic which, in anyone other than Jerome, would have been deemed itself heretical in orthodox circles.[48]

III. Augustine's Understanding of Scripture

Augustine's general outlook, as I have attempted to describe it, was based upon his understanding of scripture, which he saw as the supreme source of right doctrine, when interpreted by the mind of the Catholic Church. However, it is clear that, like other theologians and controversialists who appeal to the authority of scripture, his interpretation was conditioned by his own principles—principles that he believed to be catholic doctrine. Furthermore, in common with other Christian theologians of his own day, Augustine believed that the Bible text, being the divinely inspired word of God, was too deep and too rich in meaning to be limited by any one interpretation.[49] From St. Ambrose at Milan he had learned the allegorical

[45] Poemen 19. Translation by Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (London/Oxford: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 1975) 142.

[46] Poemen 38. Translation by Ward, *Sayings*, 145.

[47] Poemen 184. Translation by Ward, *Sayings*, 162. On the significance of this remark, see Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966) 71.

[48] On this, see Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 45-62, 75-77; Robert F. Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (New York: Seabury Press, 1968) 26-31.

[49] *Doct. Christ.* 3, 27, 38 (CCL 32, 99-100).

understanding of scripture—the text "God created Adam in his own image" (Gen. 1:27) did not imply that God himself had a human shape.[50] Later, he was to warn Christian students of the Bible about the dangers of taking literally what was meant to be understood figuratively[51] and of the importance of determining what was meant to be figurative language.[52] In the determination of what was figurative and what was literal, however, Augustine allowed himself a good measure of independence—the most famous example being his insistence on the reference to Adam in the phrase *in quo omnes peccaverunt* of Romans 5:12 during the Pelagian controversy. This is not to say that Augustine was especially idiosyncratic in his exegesis. On the contrary, his constant desire was to be in agreement with the mind of the church, as expressed in the writings of predecessors like Cyprian and Ambrose; but he was nevertheless capable, with the utmost confidence, of attributing his own particular understanding to a particular passage, without considering whether it might not also be susceptible of other interpretations, and whether his own particular understanding might not be governed by immediate, controversial concerns.

Consider, by way of illustration, his treatment of the great Pauline passage:

> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:19-23).

Augustine discusses this passage at some length in his *Epistolae ad Romanos quarundam propositionum expositio*, composed in 394/5, when he was still a presbyter at Hippo, with a deep concern for Pauline teaching and affected by feelings of hostility to the Manichaeism in which he had remained for more than nine years and against which he was going to wage an unremitting literary campaign during the coming decade. The Pauline passage is often understood as having a deep cosmic significance: it is not simply humanity but the *whole* creation that groans in travail. Augustine will have

[50] *Conf.* 6, 3, 4 (CCL 27, 76).
[51] *Doct. Christ.* 3, 5, 9 (CCL 32, 82-83).
[52] Ibid. 3, 24, 34 (CCL 32, 97).

none of this. The word "creation" (*creatura*) must refer to humanity. Trees, herbs, and stones cannot grieve and groan—that is an error of the Manichees. Nor may we think that the holy angels were subjected to vanity. Accordingly, "creation" must here be understood as meaning the human race. Every created being must be either spiritual, like the angels; animate, like the beasts; or corporal. Human nature, however, is all three: spiritual, animal, and corporal, and it is therefore humanity that "growns inwardly," awaiting its "adoption" and "the redemption of" the body.[53]

Augustine, then, has here excluded any cosmic understanding of the text. His motive is partly controversial—he does not want to provide any opening for Manichaean cosmology, which saw the whole earth as a sentient being and believed that trees suffered when their fruits were plucked;[54] but I would suggest that his lack of concern for the subhuman order of creation went deeper: he had little theological interest in the nonhuman creation except insofar as it related to the economy of salvation. "Things which are created out of nothing," he declares in the *De Natura Boni*, written in 405, "which are inferior to rational spirit, can neither be happy nor miserable."[55] Again, in the *De Libero Arbitrio*, book III, probably composed in 395, he writes:

> The suffering which animals endure makes clear the power of the animal soul which, in its own way, is admirable and deserving of praise. By ruling and animating the animal body, it shows a desire for unity. For what is suffering but a feeling of opposition to division and corruption? Hence it appears clearer than day how eager and tenacious the animal soul is for unity in the body as a whole, when it reacts to the suffering by which the wholeness and integrity of the body is destroyed, not gladly or with indifference, but reluctantly and with obstinate resistance. Were it not for the sufferings of animals we should never understand how great is the desire for [organic] unity in the lower orders of the animal kingdom; and if we did not understand that, we should not be made sufficiently aware that all these things have been established by the supreme, sublime and ineffable unity of the Creator.[56]

[53] *Ep. ad Rom. q. propositionum exp.* 45 (53) (CSEL 84, 25-29).

[54] See H.C. Puech, *Le Manichéisme: son fondateur, sa doctrine* (Paris: Civilisations du sud, 1949) 87-88; Gerald Bonner, *St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*, 2d ed. (Norwich, England: Canterbury Press, 1986) 172-173.

[55] *De Nat. Boni* 8: "Caetera vero, quae sunt facta de nihilo, quae utique inferiora sunt quam spiritus rationalis, nec beata possunt esse, nec misera" (CSEL 25: 2, 858).

[56] *De Libero Arbitrio* 3, 23, 69 (CCL 29, 316). Translation mine.

It is not necessary to be a militant campaigner for animal rights to be startled by the lack of compassion in Augustine's arguments here. For him, animals seem to be no more than automata, and he appears to be utterly indifferent to the possibility of some sense of personal identity in an animal, which would make its sufferings comparable, in some degree, with those of a human being. It is only fair to Augustine to recognize that, in this passage, he was once again trying to defend the goodness of God's creation against Manichaean criticism; and to recall that, on a later occasion, he was capable of showing a more positive appreciation of animal personality, as when he remarks, in book XIX of the *De Civitate Dei*, that a man would be more cheerful in the company of his dog than with a foreigner whose language he did not know—an early literary testimony to the companionability of man's oldest friend.[57] Moreover Augustine, in his indifference to animals, stands in a Christian tradition. The author of Deuteronomy had enjoined: "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain" (25:4). "Is it for oxen that God is concerned?" asked St. Paul. "Does he not speak entirely for our sake?" (1 Cor. 9:9-10). But Pauline precept apart, Augustine was not really interested in animals, any more than he was interested in the beauty of nature or the mysteries of the material world. His theology, except when he was constrained to defend the goodness of matter as God's creation against Manichaean depreciation, is anthropocentric. Scholars argue among themselves as to whether Augustine was a mystic, but one thing is clear: whatever he was, he was not a nature mystic. There was never any danger that, as a baptized Christian, he would neglect the Creator by becoming absorbed in the beauty and wonder of the creation. In his own words:

> God made man in his own image, by creating for him a soul of such a kind that because of it he surpassed all living creatures, on earth, in the sea, and in the sky, in virtue of reason and intelligence; for no other creature had a mind like that. God fashioned man out of the dust of the earth and gave him a soul of the kind I have described.[58]

Augustine's lack of concern with the material creation is further shown in the passage of the *Enchiridion*—a handbook, let it be remembered, of Christian doctrine—in which he discourages any deep investigation of natural phenomena.

[57] *Civ. Dei* 19, 7: ". . . ita ut libentius homo sit cum cane suo quam cum homine alieno" (CSEL 40: 2, 383).

[58] Ibid. 12, 24 (CSEL 40: 1, 608) Translation by Bettenson, *Augustine: City of God*, 503.

> When, then, it is asked what we ought to believe in matters of religion, it is not necessary to pry into the nature of things, like those whom the Greeks call physicists. The Christian need not fear to be ignorant of anything regarding the properties and numbers of the elements, the movement and order of the stars and of eclipses, the form of the heavens, the species and natures of animals, vegetables, minerals, springs of water, rivers, mountains, dimensions of space and times, the signs of impending storms, and all those thousand-and-one things which scientists have discovered, or think that they have discovered. . . . It is enough for the Christian to believe that there is no other cause of created things, whether of heaven or of earth, than the goodness of the Creator, who is the one true God, and that there is no nature which is not either himself or from him, and that he is the Trinity, namely the Father, and the Son born of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the same Father, but one and the same Spirit of the Father and Son.[59]

Augustine's fundamental lack of theological interest in the created order is yet further reflected in his injunction in the *De Doctrina Christiana* that the Christian exegete should have as much grounding in secular studies as would be useful for scriptural exegesis, and no more. *Ne quid nimis*—"Nothing to excess"—is his principle.[60] This attitude is not quite as obscurantist as it sounds. Augustine was prepared to allow secular studies some autonomy in their own fields, and was aware of the damage that was done to the Christian faith by an ignorant believer laying down the law upon matters of scientific fact, of which he knew nothing, on the strength of the Bible, in such a way as to invite mockery by an educated pagan.[61] Indeed, there is evidence that Augustine himself was not without scientific curiosity;[62] but as a mature theologian it was human nature, and humanity's rela-

[59] *ench.* 3, 9 (CCL 46, 52-53). Translation mine.

[60] *Doct. Christ.* 2, 39, 58 (CCL 32, 72).

[61] *Gen. Litt.* 1, 19, 39 (CSEL 28:1, 28-29); cf. Augustine's philosophical interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative, *Gen. Litt.* 5, 5, 9 (CSEL 28:1, 145-147).

[62] Before Augustine's conversion, it was his reading of astronomical treatises that helped to raise doubts in his mind about Manichaean cosmology (*Conf.* 5, 3, 6 [CCL 27, 59-60]) (though note the comment by David Pingree, in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 1, fasc. 4 [Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co., 1990] 489, that his "knowledge of astronomy was extremely limited, even before his conversion"). See, too, the discussion at Cassiciacum about the cause of the noise of water, heard in the baths at night (*De Ordine* 1, 3, 6-7 [CCL 29, 91-92]); Augustine's practical experiment at Carthage, when he was a bishop, to verify the assertion that the flesh of the peacock has the power of resisting posthumous putrefaction (*Civ. Dei* 21, 4 [CSEL 40:2, 517]); and his fascination with the magnetic power of the loadstone (Ibid. [CSEL 40:2, 519-521]). This *curiositas*, which is the inspiration of applied science, never left Augustine, however much he might deplore it.

tions with God, that preoccupied him. He looked forward to the second coming of Christ and the last judgment as historical events, destined to take place in the future. This meant that the Christian believer had at all times to be ready to give an answer at the judgment seat of Christ, while at the same time recognizing that "about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mk. 13:32). Augustine makes this conviction clear in his long letter, *De Fine Saeculi*, addressed to the Dalmatian bishop Hesychius, in 419. Hesychius had suggested that, although it was not possible to determine the day and the hour of the end of the age, there were certain signs, predicted in the Gospels,[63] that would enable us to understand when the end was near. Augustine would have none of this. We live in the sixth age of the world, when Christ's redemptive work is already in action.[64] Hence:

> in the state in which anyone's day of death finds him, so will the world's last day come upon him, since as a man dies on the one day, so will he be judged on the other. To this is relevant what is written in the Gospel of Mark: "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch" [Mk. 13:35-37]. But to whom does he say "all," except to his elect and his loved ones, who belong to his body, which is the church?[65]

IV. Augustine's Realized Eschatology

It is clear from this that Augustine's eschatology, the eschatology that dominates his whole approach to human destiny, is a realized eschatology: although the biblical prediction of the day of judgment is to be understood literally, and not allegorically—and Augustine devotes considerable discussion in the final book of the *De Civitate Dei* to the details of the last day, including the age at which we shall rise from the dead (thirty; because that was Christ's age at his resurrection)[66]—the Apocalypse as a whole is not, in his view, to be understood literally in all respects. One of the most signifi-

[63] Aug. *ep.* 199, 9, 25 (CSEL 57, 265).

[64] *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1, 23, 35-24, 42 (PL 34, 190-93); *Civ. Dei* 22, 30 (CSEL 40:2, 669-670). On the six ages of the world, see Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 17-23.

[65] Aug. *ep.* 199, 1, 2-3 (CSEL 57, 246).

[66] *Civ. Dei* 22, 15 (CSEL 40:2, 623-624).

cant changes to the exegesis of the Book of Revelation in later centuries was affected by Augustine's treatment of the thousand-year reign of Christ with his saints between the first and second resurrections (Rev. 20:4-6), when he abandoned the chiliastic understanding of the reign as something yet to come, replacing it with a realized eschatological interpretation, which identified the thousand-year reign with the period that had begun with Christ's resurrection and would endure until the end of the world. This period is not to be defined by a particular number of years; it is symbolic of the present sixth age.[67] In the words of Neville Figgis: "The millennial kingdom is already in existence."[68]

It was not, however, for Augustine, in existence in the way that Eusebius of Caesarea had seen the triumph of Constantine as establishing the kingdom of Christ in the world. Augustine seems to have toyed with the notion of the Roman Empire as the kingdom of God on earth in the 390s,[69] but this mood did not last. Rather, the rule of the saints is established here and now *in the church*, both militant and triumphant.

> This reign after death belongs especially to those who struggled on truth's behalf even to death; and that is why it is only the souls of the martyrs who are mentioned in the Apocalypse [Rev. 20:4]. Nevertheless we take the part as implying the whole and interpret it as meaning that the rest of the dead who belong to the church, which is the kingdom of Christ, also reign with Christ.[70]

This understanding of the reign of the saints as taking place here and now in the world, as opposed to the millenarian belief in a future reign, could clearly have implications for the attitude of Christians towards the material world in which they live—it could encourage what would today be called an environmentalist attitude on the part of Augustine. There is, however, no serious evidence that he held any such view. This was, no doubt, a consequence of his lack of concern for the present world, of which I have already spoken, strengthened by his desire that Christians should not become attached to their temporal affairs. One reason for Augustine's concern about millenarianism was the materialist character of apocryphal writ-

[67] Ibid. 20, 9 (CSEL 40:2, 448-453). See Gerald Bonner, "Augustine and Millenarianism" in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 235-254.

[68] John Neville Figgis, *The Political Aspects of St Augustine's "City of God"* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921) 72-73.

[69] Markus, *Saeculum*, 30ff.

[70] *Civ. Dei* 20, 9 (CSEL 40:2, 452). Translation mine.

ings like *The Apocalypse of St. Paul*, which were circulating in Africa in his day, which encouraged a notion of the thousand-year reign as a period of what Augustine calls "the most unrestrained material feasting, in which there will be so much to eat and drink that not only will these supplies not keep within any limit of moderation but will exceed the bounds of credulity."[71] But the matter may go deeper. Augustine was deeply suspicious of any understanding of the Christian life that promised material well-being as a reward for faith. This comes out strongly in his letter to Honoratus, *De Gratia Novi Testamenti—On the Grace of the New Testament*—written in 411-412 at the beginning of the Pelagian controversy, in which the word *gratia* is to be understood in the sense of "favor," rather than in its more common Augustinian sense of "divine aid." The Old Testament, says Augustine, speaks of material felicity as a sign of divine approval; the New Testament sees it as eternal felicity after death. In the kingdom of heaven our nature will be "changed to a better state by participation in the unchanging God, not to temporal felicity but by adoption to eternal life, which alone is happy."[72] Augustine does not, of course, suggest that temporal prosperity should never occur in a truly Christian life—clearly it may, and sometimes does. The important theological consideration, however, is that it is not an indication of God's favor, nor its absence of his wrath. As Augustine says in the *De Civitate Dei:*

> It has pleased divine Providence to prepare good things in the future for the righteous, which the wicked will not enjoy, and evil things for the ungodly, by which the good will not be tormented. However, God has decreed that temporal goods and evils should be common to good and bad alike, so that good things should not be too eagerly sought, which the bad are also seen to have, nor evil things shamefully avoided, by which the good are very frequently afflicted.[73]

Later in the *De Civitate Dei* Augustine will describe the many good things of the present world as "the consolations of the wretched and the damned and not the rewards of the blessed,"[74] emphasizing the relative nature of all worldly happiness and prosperity and their ephemeral character. He does not, however, allege that Christians may not lawfully hope for temporal

[71] Ibid. 20, 7 (CSEL 40:2, 440). See Bonner, "Augustine and Millenarianism," 241-244.

[72] Aug. *ep.* 140, 36, 83 (CSEL 44, 230). See Gerald Bonner, "The Significance of Augustine's *De Gratia Novi Testamenti*," in *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T.J. Van Bavel* (Louvain: Institutum Historicum Augustinianum, 1991) 531-539.

[73] *Civ. Dei* 1, 8 (CSEL 40:1, 13). Translation mine.

[74] Ibid. 22, 24 (CSEL 40:2, 649).

good things, provided that they use them rightly, as a means of coming to the good things that endure.[75] "Solid joys and lasting treasure / None but Zion's children know."

Yet, as we have seen, in the twentieth book of the *De Civitate Dei* Augustine maintains that the reign of Christ with his saints has already begun in the present world through the church, whose members include both living and departed Christians.[76] Like its individual members whom God has elected to salvation, the church is both in this world, *in via*, on the way to eternal happiness, and yet also within the eternal kingdom.[77] Already, in this world, a change is taking place. The leaven is at work; and to that extent the terrestrial world is being prepared for transformation into the new world described in the twenty-first chapter of Revelation,[78] as predestined new members are added to the church. But this transformation is essentially the transformation of human hearts, and this perhaps explains why, at the deepest level, millenarianism, which is entirely eschatological, proved unsatisfactory for Augustine, because it did not allow for his belief that the church on earth is already, in a certain sense, living in eternity through its departed members, who are united to those still living in the world in the offering of the eucharist,[79] in which time and eternity momentarily impinge upon one another. But this encounter, by its very character, *can* only be momentary. In the world of time, the kingdom of Christ is still only journeying towards fulfillment; it has not yet arrived.

It was this consideration that underlay Augustine's refusal to admit Bishop Hesychius' suggestion that it was possible to recognize the signs of the approaching end of the world. Before the world ends, the gospel must be preached to all the nations,[80] so that the church may be universally established; but this was far from being the case in Augustine's day, as it remains in our own. Augustine quotes the Psalm: "A thousand years in thy sight are but as one day" (Ps. 90:4), adding: "and whatever should take place in those thousand years might be said to have taken place in the last time or the last hour."[81] We are, for Augustine, living as the end approaches, *sed uondum finis*—but the end is not yet (Mk. 13:7).

[75] *Doct. Christ.* 1, 4, 4 (CCL 32, 8).
[76] *Civ. Dei* 20, 9 (CSEL 40:2, 451).
[77] Ibid. 1, 1 (CSEL 40:1, 3).
[78] Ibid. 20, 14. See above, p. 92 and n. 36.
[79] Ibid. 20, 9: "Neque enim piorum animae mortuorum separantur ab ecclesia, quae nunc etiam est regnum Christi. Alioquin nec ad altare Dei fieret eorum memoria in communicatione corporis Christi" (CSEL 40:2, 451).
[80] Aug. *epp.* 197, 4 (CSEL 57, 233); 199, 12, 46-47 (CSEL 57, 284-286).
[81] Aug. *ep.* 199, 6, 17 (CSEL 57, 257).

Accordingly, for Augustine, the concern of Christians in the present age is essentially with the enlarging of the church, which Christ has appointed to be the means whereby the benefits of his redeeming sacrifice should be communicated to humanity, rather than with a pursuit of temporal well-being. Frederico García Lorca declared that the day when hunger was eradicated would produce the greatest spiritual explosion that the world has ever seen.[82] Augustine would certainly have agreed that human physical suffering should, as far as possible, be relieved;[83] but he would have felt it far more urgent to satisfy the spiritual hunger of humanity with the Living Bread that came down from heaven.

> Jesus said to them: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" [Jn. 6:35]. "He who comes to me"—this means the same as "he who believes in me"; and what he said: "he shall never hunger" must be understood as meaning "he shall never thirst," for by both he signifies that eternal fulness where there is no want. You desire bread from heaven. You have it before you—and you do not eat.[84]

The conclusion is clear. Augustine did not disparage this temporal world but his mind was fixed on things eternal, and he would have found much of our present concern with the environment excessive, and even dangerous, inasmuch as it distracts us from our final end. "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal" (Jn. 6:27).

[82] Quoted by Ian Gibson, *The Death of Lorca* (Frogmore, St Alban's: Paladin Books, 1974) 54.

[83] Note his readiness to melt down church-plate to redeem captives carried off by the barbarians (Possidius *V.A.* 24 [PL 32, 54]) and his complaint about the reluctance of his congregation to contribute funds for the relief of poverty (*ep.* 36, 4, 7 [CSEL 34:2, 36]).

[84] *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV* 25, 14 (CCL 36, 255). Translation mine. Orwell would have found this attitude intolerable: "The pious ones, from the Pope to the yogis of California, are great on the 'change of heart,' much more assuring from their point of view than a change in the economic system" (*Homage to Catalonia*, 244); cf. his remark, in his essay on Charles Dickens: "A 'change of heart' is in fact *the* alibi of people who do not wish to endanger the *status quo*" (*Dickens, Dali and Others* [San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, n.d.] 22). However, Orwell was well aware of the problems raised by the loss of religious belief. "The only easy way out [of accepting life on earth as inherently miserable] is that of the religious believer, who regards this life merely as a preparation for the next. But few thinking people now believe in life after death, and the number who do is probably diminishing. . . . The real problem is how to restore the religious attitude while accepting death as final. Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness" ("Arthur Koestler" in *Dickens, Dali and Others*, 200). Orwell's attitude to Christianity was a curious one. An *anima naturaliter christiana*, without connections with any church, he unexpectedly asked for burial in an English churchyard (see Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* [Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1982] 115, 580).

Engineering the Millennium: Kingdom Building in American Protestantism, 1880-1920

by James H. Moorhead

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When Lewis French Stearns, a professor at Bangor Theological Seminary in Maine, wrote a survey of religious thought published in 1893, he declared that the "greatest achievement of recent theology" was the rediscovery of the kingdom of God. In this "germinal doctrine," said Stearns, were to be found the basic elements of the entire "system of Christian truth." The kingdom "consists in the doing of God's will on earth as it is done in heaven." This kingdom, Stearns emphasized, was to be achieved within history, and it was not limited to the church. Thus he concluded:

> We must, therefore, beware of too narrow a view of the kingdom. We must not confine it to the things of the church. We must recognize the fact that our Lord is King in the secular sphere as truly as in the religious. . . . The kingdom comes not only in the addition of converts to the church and the building up of Christians in holy living, but in the establishment of better principles of business, in the equitable settlement of the relation between capital and labor, in the moral reforms by which deep-seated social vices or abuses are overcome, in the elevation of politics, in the advance of civilization, in the cessation of war, in improved sanitary arrangements in our cities, even in the prevention of cruelty to animals and the increasing sense of obligation to avoid waste and needless destruction in the use of the products of material nature. The Christian who grasps the conception of the kingdom cannot be narrow-minded. His interests are as wide as the earth itself.

No less than the church, all other human institutions—the family, the state, "labor, commerce, the trades and professions, science art, and literature"—were to fall under the sway of the kingdom.[1]

[1] Lewis French Stearns, *Present Day Theology: A Popular Discussion of Leading Doctrines of the Christian Faith*, 3d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897) 110, 123, 124, 125.

The idea of the kingdom of God became a powerful motif among moderate to liberal Protestants between 1880 and the 1920s. At one level, the notion continued the faith of pre–Civil War postmillennialists who likewise had believed that Christ's progressive spiritual conquest of the world would win secular as well as sacred trophies. Yet Stearns correctly discerned something novel in contemporary Protestant views of the kingdom. The secular fruits of the millennium, previously regarded as byproducts of the kingdom, were increasingly sought as objects worthy of direct pursuit in their own right. Adapting the thought of European figures such as W. H. Fremantle, Frederick Denison Maurice, and Albrecht Ritschl, the advocates of the new view regarded the kingdom as a present ethical reality growing to fulfillment in *all* areas of human life.[2]

To build such a kingdom, Protestants turned to worldly instruments. In an age of mushrooming corporations and proliferating forms of scientific and professional specialization, these instruments included creation of new religious organizations—as well as the revamping of old ones—in accord with the principles of rational planning, businesslike management, and professional expertise. Like business, government, and research universities, the churches increasingly bureaucratized and professionalized their internal life. Undergirding this transformation was the idea of the kingdom. Organizations were created and reshuffled in the name of building the kingdom. For many, advancing God's reign became as much a matter of structure, technical knowledge, and competence as it was of piety or devotion. A writer for the *Methodist Review* in 1914 summed up the matter succinctly: "Ah! the city which John saw! ... It will take considerable engineering as well as preaching to get the whole world there. Hail, Engineer, coagent of the millennium."[3]

[2] On postmillennialism and its transmutation into liberal views of the kingdom of God, see my essays: "Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800-1880," *Journal of American History* 71 (December 1984) 524-542; "The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925," *Church History* 53 (March 1984) 61-77; and "Prophecy, Millennialism, and Biblical Interpretation in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991) 291-302. See also William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[3] R. O. Everhart, "Engineering and the Millennium," *Methodist Review* 96 (1914) 44. Protestants, of course, created numerous organizations prior to this era—witness the various societies of the Evangelical United Front formed in the first three decades of the nineteenth century—but in comparison to their counterparts after 1880, these early bodies were smaller, less bureaucratized, and relatively unburdened by self-conscious adherence to the canons of professional expertise and rational planning. For accounts of professionalization, the growth of corporations, and the specialization of knowledge during the years after the Civil War, see Clyde W. Barrow, *Universities*

I. The Social Gospel and the Professionalization of the Kingdom

The kingdom-building theme was most unabashedly present in the Social Gospel. An attempt to apply Christian principles to the problems of society and to reform the inequities of the current order, social Christianity assumed, in the words of economist and lay theologian Richard Ely, that "Christianity is primarily concerned with this world, and it is the mission of Christianity to bring to pass here a kingdom of righteousness ... and redeem all our social relations."[4] The decisive orientation of the kingdom to this world had major implications for Social Gospelers' understanding of the duty of the churches. Since ecclesiastical bodies did not constitute the fullness of the kingdom and could not by themselves bring in the reign of God, they needed to enlist secular instruments. In assessing the church's relationship to secular entities, Washington Gladden insisted: "Its life is their life; it cannot live apart from them; it lives by what it gives to them; it has neither meaning nor justification except in what it does to vitalize and

and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education, 1894-1928 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976); Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1977); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982) 3-10; and Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967) 11-110, 142. In general, historians of American Christianity have paid little attention to the churches' adoption of business methods, corporate models, and professionalism. For important exceptions, see Paul M. Harrison, *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition: A Social Case Study of the American Baptist Convention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); Ben Primer, *Protestants and American Business Methods* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979); and Louis Weeks, "The Incorporation of American Religion: The Case of the Presbyterians," *Religion and American Culture* 1 (Winter 1991) 100-118. Also very helpful is Milton J Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis Weeks, eds., *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). See also James H. Moorhead, "Presbyterians and the Mystique of Organizational Efficiency, 1870-1936," in *Reimagining Denominationalism*, ed. Robert Bruce Mullin and Russell E. Richey (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[4] Richard T. Ely, *Social Aspects of Christianity and Other Essays* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1889) 53. Standard works on the Social Gospel include Aaron Ignatius Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943); Robert D. Cross, ed., *The Church and the City, 1865-1910* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967); James Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936); Robert D. Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); C. Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); and Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1949). Susan Curtis treats the movement as a promoter of the ethos of corporate consumerism in *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1991). Donald K. Gorrell examines the institutionalization of the Social Gospel in *The Age of Social Responsibility: The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988).

spiritualize business and politics and amusement and art and literature and education, and every other interest of society."[5]

Social Gospel clergy reflected an enlarged view of the church's task in the profusion of activities they undertook. Washington Gladden, long-time pastor of the First Congregational Church in Columbus, Ohio, and one of the earliest leaders in the Social Gospel, served a term on the city council, acted as a mediator in labor disputes, helped create an agency that coordinated the work of religious and charitable organizations in Columbus, and lobbied Congress for the creation of a federal commission on industrial relations.[6] Josiah Strong, another pioneer in social Christianity, established a League for Social Service in 1898 and participated in the creation of the New York State Conference of Religion, which aimed at promoting a unified religious approach to the problems of modern society and included Jews and Unitarians within its membership. After 1908, he chaired the Research Committee of the Commission on the Church and Social Service, an arm of the newly formed Federal Council of Churches.[7] During his pastorate in New York City, Walter Rauschenbusch, who was the foremost theologian of the Social Gospel, actively supported the mayoral candidacy of the radical Henry George. After assuming a professorship at Rochester Theological Seminary, Rauschenbusch interjected himself into a public dispute over the rates charged by the local gas and electric utility, organized efforts to make the city's streetcar line more responsive to the needs of the poor and middle class, gave a nominating speech for another unsuccessful mayoral candidate, and chaired a committee investigating the public school system.[8] Probably no individual better illustrated the Social Gospel's expansion of the ministerial role than Graham Taylor. A pastorate in downtown Hartford, Connecticut acquainted him with the forces shaping the lives of the poor, aroused his interest in sociology, and redirected his career. In 1892, he became the head of the newly formed Department of Christian Sociology at the Chicago Theological Seminary. Two years later he founded the Chicago Commons, a settlement house where he and his wife along with their four children took up residence. The Commons ran a day nurs-

[5] Washington Gladden, *The Christian Pastor and the Working Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898) 44.

[6] Jacob H. Dorn, *Washington Gladden: Prophet of the Social Gospel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968).

[7] Wendy J. Deichmann, "Josiah Strong: Practical Theologian and Social Crusader for a Global Kingdom" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1991).

[8] Paul M. Minus, *Walter Rauschenbusch: American Reformer* (New York: Macmillan, 1988).

ery, a kindergarten, and open forums where persons of all persuasions (political and religious) could vent their ideas. Moreover, Taylor and his colleagues were heavily involved in efforts to elect reform-minded candidates to office in Chicago. In conjunction with the University of Chicago, he founded and directed what ultimately became the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy.[9]

Why did Social Gospelers engage in such a dizzying round of activities? Taylor pointed to the book of Revelation, whose picture "of Christianity triumphant was not in another world, but in this one; not of a Church, but of a 'Holy City'; not a mere multitude of saved souls, but of the 'nations of them which are saved,' organised into a saved human society, in which 'the tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people and God himself shall be with them and be their God.' "[10] Washington Gladden gave a similar answer: "Christianity is not merely for Sundays and prayer-meetings, for closet and death-bed; it is for shop and office, for counting-room and factory, for kitchen and drawing-room, for forum and council-chamber." This was the essence, he said, of the "Gospel of the Kingdom"—the message "that God is organizing on earth a divine society; that the New Jerusalem, whose walls are salvation and whose gates are praise, is rising here upon sure foundations."[11]

Searching for effective ways to build the New Jerusalem, Social Gospelers turned to science, especially to the social sciences that were then emerging as distinct disciplines within the hierarchy of schools and departments that made up the new research universities. "Science," Josiah Strong declared in 1893, "which is a revelation of God's laws and methods, enables us to fall into his plans intentionally and to co-operate with him intelligently for the perfecting of mankind, thus hastening forward the coming of the kingdom."[12] Richard Ely, himself one of the new breed of research-oriented social scientists, warned that Christians must not succumb to

> dilettanteism [*sic*] with respect to those duties which we owe our fellows. . . . Philanthropy must be grounded in profound sociological studies. Otherwise, so complex is modern society that in our efforts to help man we may only injure him. Not all are capable of research in sociology,

[9] Louise C. Wade, *Graham Taylor: Pioneer for Social Justice, 1851-1938* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

[10] Graham Taylor, *Religion in Social Action* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1913) 6.

[11] Gladden, *Christian Pastor*, 112-113.

[12] Josiah Strong, *The New Era* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1893) 30.

but the Church should call to her service in this field the greatest intellects of the age.[13]

Warren Wilson, a Presbyterian denominational executive and an architect of a Social Gospel for rural churches, also believed that university-trained experts had a high-priestly role to play in achieving God's purposes. The kingdom would come only as the churches were willing to serve as the "channels by which the knowledge that the universities have in store can come to the use of the people."[14] In Ely, Wilson, and many other Social Gospelers, there was much of the spirit of the young John Dewey who told the Student Christian Association that prayer for moderns was identical to the attitude of scientific inquiry and that science could aid mightily in "the building of the Kingdom of God on earth."[15]

To direct this scientific knowledge into useful channels, Social Gospelers created new organizations: for example, departments or chairs of sociology in seminaries; institutional churches operating libraries, gymnasia, employment bureaus, and kindergartens; settlement houses in which middle class volunteers both served and learned from the poor. This organizing process also produced new agencies within denominations. Initially these were voluntary societies—for example, among Episcopalians, the Church Association for the Advancement of the Interests of Labor (1887), the Society of Christian Socialists (1889), and the Christian Social Union (1891); and among Baptists, the Brotherhood of the Kingdom. But after 1900, the Social Gospel carved out a niche within official denominational structures. In 1903, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. created a Workingman's

[13] Ely, *Social Aspects of Christianity*, 17, 88.

[14] Warren H. Wilson, *The Second Missionary Adventure* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1915) 29.

[15] Dewey is quoted in David A. Hollinger, "Justification by Verification: The Scientific Challenge to the Moral Authority of Christianity in Modern America," in *Religion and Twentieth-Century Intellectual Life*, ed. Michael J. Lacey (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Cambridge University Press, 1989) 128. Works stressing the religious origins—especially the millennial ones—of American social science include Jean B. Quandt, "Religion and Social Thought: The Secularization of Postmillennialism," *American Quarterly* 25 (October 1973) 390-409; and Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). See also Arthur J. Vidich and Stanford M. Lyman, *American Sociology: Worldly Rejections of Religion and Their Directions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). The now little-remembered effort to create a Social Gospel for the rural church and Warren Wilson's role in that endeavor are treated in James H. Madison, "Reformers and the Rural Church, 1900-1950," *Journal of American History* 73 (December 1986) 645-668; and Merwin Swanson, "The Country Life Movement and the Churches," *Church History* 46 (September 1977) 358-373.

Department within its Board of Home Missions and called as its head Charles Stelzle, an ordained minister and himself a son of the immigrant working class. In 1907 the National Council of Congregational Churches made its Industrial Committee a standing body, and the same year the Methodist Federation for Social Service came into existence. Although it remained formally a voluntary society, the Federation often functioned as the denomination's de facto arm of social witness. The American Baptist Convention formed a Commission on Social Service in 1908 under the leadership of veteran Social Gospeler Samuel Zane Batten who, four years later, received a paid appointment. In 1910, the Congregationalists employed a Secretary of Labor and Social Service, and by 1912 Episcopalians had a Joint Commission on Social Service with a full-time field secretary. In short, the Social Gospel spun out larger, more elaborate denominational bureaucracies and in the process its locus within American Protestantism shifted. In its early days, social Christianity was a movement composed chiefly of pastors; by 1920, it had become the preserve of denominational leaders, professors, and persons in specialized ministries.[16]

Where did this emphasis upon scientific expertise, specialization, and organization lead? One answer was provided by an interdenominational Commission of Inquiry that investigated the Pittsburgh steel strike of 1919. While issuing a stinging indictment of the labor policies of the industry, the Commission tacitly assumed that the churches themselves needed to function rather like a unified corporation if they were to perform their ministry to society. During the strike, said the Commission's report, churches in Pittsburgh lacked the resources to investigate "the entire field of the steel industry," and they were hobbled by the campaign of misinformation perpetrated by U.S. Steel and large segments of the press. Only "an organization which in some sense represents the united forces of all the churches of the nation" would be powerful enough to overcome these obstacles and to have "an influence on the general course of public opinion." Only such a body could mobilize the resources to conduct the continuing surveys recommended by the Commission and only they could galvanize public opinion. To shape America in an era of giant corporations and big government, the churches needed to act like a well-integrated corporation if they would build the kingdom.[17]

[16] A succinct analysis of these developments is contained in Gorrell, *Age of Social Responsibility*, 131-153.

[17] *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1921) 263, 265.

II. Missions and Kingdom Building by Business Methods

The foreign-missions movement, entering its heyday in the several decades after 1880, also drew inspiration from the hope of building the kingdom; but that view was not uncontested. The expanding ranks of premillennialists ardently supported missions; but they repudiated the idea that Christians might bring in the kingdom. Deeming the current world to be hopelessly corrupt, premillennialists awaited a new order that Christ would establish when he returned in glory. On the basis of Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24:14, they believed that once missionaries preached the gospel to all nations, the end would come. In short, the missionary enterprise could not build the kingdom, but it might hasten the second advent. Because premillennialists gave considerable support to the work of missions, leaders who had little sympathy with their eschatology often muted the rhetoric of kingdom building.[18]

Despite their hedged and guarded statements, however, many leaders operated with the *implicit* assumption that missions could inaugurate the kingdom. For example, John R. Mott, while theoretically denying that the aim of the movement was to Christianize the world, frequently spoke as if this were the goal. In an address at the Ecumenical Missionary Conference in 1900, he surveyed the multitudes of missionaries already at work, the vast wealth at the disposal of western Christians, and the ease of modern communication and travel. God providentially provided these "wonderful agencies," said Mott, "as a handmaid to the sublime enterprise of extending and building up the kingdom of Jesus Christ in the world. The hand of God, in opening door after door among the nations, and in bringing to light invention after invention, is beckoning the Church of our day to larger achievements." Those achievements might be grand indeed. Mott closed by suggesting that ten million people could be converted to the faith in the next decade and that by the end of the twentieth century—possibly within the lifetime of some assembled there—Christianity would win predominance in both India and China.[19]

[18] William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 118-121; Dana L. Robert, " 'The Crisis of Missions': Premillennial Mission Theory and the Origins of Independent Evangelical Missions," in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, ed. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990) 29-46.

[19] *Ecumenical Missionary Conference: Report of the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions, Held in Carnegie Hall and Neighboring Churches, April 21 to May 1*, 2 vols. (New York: American Tract Society, 1900) 1.95-103.

Kingdom-building zeal also appeared in glowing claims that missions were improving civilization. "Is the Kingdom of God growing?" asked Sidney Gulick, an American Board missionary to Japan, in 1898. Emphatically yes, he replied, "and never so fast as in the last decades of the nineteenth century." Evidence of growth could be read not only in increasing church rolls but in the moral and social results Christianity produced: improved opportunities for education, heightened sensitivity to injustice, and the increase of charitable organizations.[20] James S. Dennis, who served for a time in the Presbyterian Mission in Syria, made a similar case. In three ponderous volumes bearing the title *Christian Missions and Social Progress* (1887-1906), he offered an exhaustive—and exhausting—catalogue of the beneficial social results of the missionary movement in nonwestern lands. Wherever Christianity had taken hold, it promoted industrious habits, restrained gambling, elevated the status of women and children, abolished cannibalism, introduced modern medicine, brought relief from famine, established orphan asylums, promoted sanitation, developed industrial training, produced better government, wrought technological advance, and produced a more prosperous standard of living. Dennis' list went on almost ad infinitum. He hoped that his demonstration of the "tendency in missionary activities to work for human betterment" would induce Christians to yet more vigorous labors "for the expansion of Christ's kingdom."[21]

Dennis and Gulick insisted that conversions, not the improvement of society, remained the chief aim of missions; but in effect they had decisively moved toward a far more comprehensive view of the work. Many influences contributed to this shift. As workers flowed more numerously into the mission stations in the late nineteenth century, not all could be put to work as preachers of the gospel. This was especially true of women, who were denied ordination by most denominations. Many of these persons, men as well as women, found their place in an expanding array of new institutions—schools, hospitals, and medical facilities, for example. The ethos of imperialism, at flood tide during this era, also left its mark. Although numerous supporters of missions wanted no truck with U.S. expansionism, foreign missions often became, in William Hutchison's phrase, "a moral equivalent of imperialism." To the extent that both movements rested on

[20] Sidney L. Gulick, *The Growth of the Kingdom of God* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1898) 308, 318.

[21] James S. Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress: A Sociological Study of Foreign Missions*, 3 vols. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1897-1906) 2.v-vi.

assumptions of Anglo-Saxon superiority and destiny to uplift the world, that ethos subtly moved missionary advocacy from narrowly religious to more broadly cultural and social concerns. In the final analysis, however, an enlarged conception of the missionary task found its chief legitimation in the new understanding of the kingdom of God as a reality "as wide as the earth itself."[22]

The increasing numbers of missionaries and sponsoring agencies also dictated a new approach. By the early twentieth century, missionary work constituted a far-flung empire. According to one count, American missionaries abroad climbed in number from 934 in 1880 to over 9,000 in 1915. A small home staff could not administer this enterprise nor could haphazard appeals for money fund it. The day of the missionary endeavor as a kind of "mom-and-pop" operation was giving way to the era of missions as a series of highly structured corporations. The most obvious change was the growth of agencies. By 1915, more than three million women held membership in forty denominational women's missionary societies. Major interdenominational organizations included the Student Volunteer Movement, the Laymen's Missionary Movement, the Missionary Education Movement, and the Foreign Missions Conference of North America. In 1928, Presbyterian Robert E. Speer computed that organizations promoting or sponsoring missions had risen to 122 at the time he wrote.

Yet far more significant than increasing numbers of organizations were the changes that took place within them. For example, the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church had twelve staff members in 1890, twenty-six by 1908, and sixty-three in 1919. Before 1893, the three executives functioned as ministers without portfolio, dabbling in various phases of administration and dividing up duties in an informal manner. Gradually the Board demarcated lines of authority and placed executives over discrete administrative units. By 1919, the Board consisted of a central executive staff and three subordinate divisions: Foreign, Home, and Treasury. Each of the divisions in turn had five to seven separate departments. Raising money became a major preoccupation of all missionary groups. They increasingly favored central agencies to coordinate budgets; and to raise moneys they inundated the local churches with promotional literature extolling the virtue of stewardship, defined as proportionate giving. By encouraging the every-member canvass, they hoped to rescue finances from the uncer-

[22] Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 102-117.

tainties of the old random system that relied on special offerings. Systematic finance was the watchword of the hour.[23]

A new kind of leader flourished in this environment. An earlier generation had thrilled to the adventures of missionaries like Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann Haseltine as they braved the dangers of Burma. Although the romance of missions did not die out and the heroism of people like Horace Tracy Pitkin (who was martyred in the Boxer uprising in 1900) still inspired supporters at home, the missionaries themselves were generally less prominent by 1900. The commanding presences were the missionary executives. Often lay people and activists more than theoreticians, these administrators were heroes because they set themselves to great organizational tasks and accomplished them. John R. Mott provides the example par excellence. Often described as a missionary and ecumenical statesman, Mott held up to the churches a global vision of Christian work and cooperation. In service to that goal, he traveled the planet, spoke at conferences, and inspired countless men and women with his dream. Yet it was as an organizer that Mott left his greatest mark. He played a leading role in creating the Student Volunteer Movement, the World's Student Christian Federation, the Foreign Work Department of the International YMCA, and the Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference. With consummate skill and mastery of the smallest details, he sat through or presided over countless meetings, composed differences, set new organizations in motion, and kept existing ones functioning. What has been said of his friend Robert E. Speer, an executive of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions for forty-six years and an ecumenical statesman in his own right, could be applied with equal justice to Mott himself: He "had a way of making bureaucratic transformation seem filled with high moral and spiritual purpose."[24]

[23] Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985) 93-122; Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 99-102; Primer, *Protestants and American Business Methods*, 127-148; Valentin H. Rabe, *The Home Base of American China Missions, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978) 9-48, 141-191; Robert E. Speer, "A Few Comparisons of Then and Now," *Missionary Review of the World* 51 (January 1928) 5.

[24] Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Mission for Life: The Story of the Family of Adoniram Judson* (New York: Free Press, 1980); Robert E. Speer, *A Memorial of Horace Tracy Pitkin* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1903) 82. On Mott, consult C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979). The description of Speer is from Richard W. Reifsnyder, "The Reorganizational Impulse in American Protestantism: The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a Case Study, 1788-1983" (Ph. D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1984) 333.

Missionary leaders were themselves aware of the change and spoke in new accents. "The Lord's work as well as man's," said Arthur Judson Brown of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, "calls for business methods." He boasted that missions boards often included "bank presidents, successful merchants, railroad directors, great lawyers, managers of large corporations," who applied their common-sense skills to "the extension of the kingdom of God." According to Brown, even "the typical missionary is more like a high-grade Christian business man of the homeland than a professional cleric."[25] William Newton Clarke insisted that "the romantic period" of missions, with its dramatic accounts of exploits abroad, was of necessity giving way to a more prosaic era. Successful foreign work demanded "sound business methods, and skill in administration, and versatility in operation" as much as piety.[26] Samuel B. Capen likewise vaunted organizational prowess in his centennial address to the American Board in 1910. "In harmony," he declared, "with the highest business methods of our time, mission work is being consolidated in order to prevent waste and insure economy and efficiency." Turning missions into a species of religious corporation promised extraordinary things. "It is the age of great plans and of great enterprises in the business world; our Christian merchants and capitalists should be equally generous in their plans and gifts for missions.... If they will our rich men can plant Christian institutions everywhere in the East and rule it for Christ." With this grand vision set forth, Capen recited familiar lines evoking the hope of the coming kingdom:

> He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
> He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat;
> Oh, be swift my soul to answer Him! be jubilant my feet!
> Our God is marching on.[27]

The kingdom was coming, but it was coming through big budgets and large organizations self-consciously patterned after corporations. Kingdom building now required a great deal of organization tending.

[25] Arthur Judson Brown, *The Why and How of Foreign Missions*, 3d ed. (New York: Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1908) 35, 39.

[26] William Newton Clarke, *A Study of Christian Missions* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900) 134-135, 172, 226.

[27] Samuel B. Capen, *The Next Ten Years* (Boston: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1910) 10, 21-22, 30.

III. Ecumenical Architects and Efficiency Engineers

Advocates of both foreign missions and the Social Gospel knew that their hope of building the kingdom confronted a major obstacle in the disunity of Protestant churches. In face of the social dislocations wrought by urbanization and industrialization and in light of the swelling tide of Catholic and Jewish immigration, Protestants could not hope to mold America and the world unless they learned to work together. John R. Mott declared in 1905: "In the presence of an unbelieving world ... we have come to see that anything short of union in spirit and practical effort is destined to be futile." Two years later, the Congregational minister Newman Smyth framed the charge more sharply still. Losing control over vast areas of modern life, Smyth averred, Protestantism "has frayed out into so many separate strands. No single thread of it is strong enough to move the whole social mechanism; it is like so many ravellings; at most one strand may move a few wheels." Out of this awareness was born the first American attempt at church federation at the national level: the Federal Council of Churches, organized in 1908 with thirty-three member communions.[28]

At the first meeting of the Council, Frank Mason North summarized the body's goal succinctly: "Primarily we are engaged in establishing his [God's] kingdom in these United States." Before adjourning, the Council sent to the constituent denominations a letter, pledging itself to "wiser and larger service for America and for the Kingdom of God." The Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. declared that the Council was the living embodiment of the churches' duty "to hasten the coming of the day when the true King of Men shall everywhere be crowned as Lord of all. This Council stands for the hope of organized work for speedy Christian advance toward world conquest."[29]

In the letter announcing its formation, the Federal Council succinctly expressed its rationale. By uniting their "scattered forces," Protestants would realize "the reduction of waste" and "the production of power." The happy results would be "increased efficiency in Christian service" and advancement of "the broad interests of the Kingdom of God." The choice of the

[28] John A. Hutchison, *We Are Not Divided: A Critical and Historical Study of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America* (New York: Round Table Press, 1941) 16-53; Samuel McCrea Cavert, *The American Churches in the Ecumenical Movement, 1900-1968* (New York: Association Press, 1968) 15-51; Elias B. Sanford, *Church Federation: Inter-Church Conference on Federation, New York, November 15-21, 1905* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1906) 434; Newman Smyth, *Passing Protestantism and Coming Catholicism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908) 27-28.

[29] Elias B. Sanford, *Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America: Report of the First Meeting of the Federal Council, Philadelphia, 1908* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1909) 229, 323, 508.

word "efficiency" was significant, for about 1910 Americans entered upon what Samuel Haber has called

> an efficiency craze—a secular Great Awakening, an outpouring of ideas and emotions in which a gospel of efficiency was preached without embarrassment to businessmen, workers, doctors, housewives, and teachers, and yes, preached even to preachers. . . . Efficient and good came closer to meaning the same thing in these years than in any other period of American history.[30]

As a result of the Federal Council's rhetorical linkage of efficiency and the kingdom, many Protestants were eager to join the crusade.[31]

Shailer Mathews of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago was one of the first church leaders to offer a systematic application of efficiency to religious life. He was the ideal person to do so. A scholar-activist possessed of frenetic energy, Mathews initially held a post in New Testament history but subsequently transferred to the field of theology. At the time of his retirement in 1931, he was simultaneously Dean of the Divinity School, Chair of the Department of Christian Theology and Ethics, and Professor of Historical Theology. Heavy teaching and administrative responsibilities notwithstanding, Mathews was an active churchman, serving as one of the chief movers in the organization of the Northern (later American) Baptist Convention and as president both of that body and of the Federal Council of Churches. He also published prodigiously. His works emphasized what he called "pragmatic Christianity"—a religion that was a way of life rather than a set of fixed tenets. Doctrines were tools, shaped in accord with particular cultures or worldviews, to promote larger ends. In the modern age, Mathews believed, Christians were attaining a more thorough awareness of the instrumental character of doctrine, and he predicted "a detheologizing of the Christian movement." Henceforth Christians would no longer look for "common theology" but to a "solidarity of undertaking . . . in the activities of the Christian group," and this unity would find expression in "a more intelligent attempt to put the attitudes and spirit of Jesus into the hearts of men and the operation of institutions." This functionalist understanding of Christianity found its logical expression in the philosophy of

[30] Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964; reprint, 1973) ix.

[31] Sanford, *Federal Council*, 508-509.

efficiency. In businesslike management, Mathews discovered the device needed to make faith socially efficacious in an age of corporations.[32]

Mathews set forth his thoughts on the subject in *Scientific Management in the Churches*, delivered at the Sagamore Beach Sociological Conference in the summer of 1911 and published the following year. The book—patterned on Frederick Winslow Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), the "bible" of the efficiency movement—assumed that the preeminent task of Christians was "to serve God and bring in his Kingdom" and that to this end "the Christian spirit must be institutionalized if it is to prevail in an age of institutions." Using principles derived from Taylor and other efficiency experts, Mathews argued that efficiency required "the centering of attention on operation." By this bureaucratic phrase, he meant that churches needed to know what they were trying to accomplish. Too often content with affirmations of general purpose, congregations should frame highly specific goals on the basis of a careful annual survey of their respective communities. Efficiency also mandated standardized operations and the division of labor. Mathews advocated the formation of a "committee of management" to educate church members regarding their tasks, to assign them to appropriate work, to avoid duplication of effort, and to coordinate all activities. "Theoretically," he observed, "the church should be regarded as a body of workmen ready to perform definite tasks as these tasks are outlined for them by its committee of management." This work demanded a new type of minister. He must be "a man who institutionalizes a belief and an attitude toward life rather than a man who simply proclaims a truth." People of this sort would be "trained to be chairmen of committees of management with the capacity to study situations and adjust churches to situations, rather than merely to preach good sermons." Or, as Mathews summarized in an article four years after *Scientific Management*, a minister might "set churches into operation by spiritual preaching," but would fall short of ultimate success without the "grace of committees."[33]

According to Edwin L. Earp, professor of Christian sociology at Drew Seminary in New Jersey, efficiency demanded a style of religious leadership

[32] Shailer Mathews, *The Faith of Modernism* (New York: Macmillan, 1925) 178-179. On Mathews' life, consult Shailer Mathews, *New Faith for Old: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1936); and Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) 48-59.

[33] Shailer Mathews, *Scientific Management in the Churches* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912) v, 16, 37, 44-45, 55-56, 57, 58, 60-61; Shailer Mathews, "Theological Seminaries as Schools of Religious Efficiency," *Biblical World* 47 (1916) 84.

embodied in what a later generation would call "the organization man." Or, as he phrased the issue in 1911, "we must develop a new type of minister or religious worker, a religious social engineer." A specialist in some aspect of ministry, the religious engineer would be a person "who can help ... establish a desired working force in any field of need, and keep it in sympathetic cooperation with all other forces working for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth." He or she would supervise those "at work with the machinery" of the church and assure that no "social friction" jarred the gears. With the help of these engineers, the churches could achieve their ultimate goal: an "administrative efficiency that will result in permanent social control." Every problem Protestant America faced—for example, the saloon, the assimilation of immigrant groups, the alienation of the laboring classes—would yield to this benign authority. Like machines, American society and its churches needed only the expert technocrat to make them hum synchronously with the music of God's kingdom.[34]

In the wake of World War I, Protestant leaders embarked upon their most grandiose venture in the name of efficiency and ecumenism. In early 1919, they launched the Interchurch World Movement and gave it a large agenda: "a scientific survey of the world's needs from the standpoint ... of evangelical Christianity," the development of "a cooperative community and world program" to meet those needs, and the mobilization of "resources of life, money, and prayer" to make the program a reality. The leaders of the movement described its goal with audacious simplicity.

> The program of the Interchurch World Movement calls for an unprecedented degree of cooperation among the churches of North America in their entire missionary program at home and abroad. Its two-fold responsibility is first to find the facts and second to face the facts. Once the facts are discovered and confronted, the titanic task of the cooperating Christian churches will be to make the kingdoms of this world the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

To achieve these large aims, thirty denominations agreed to conduct a campaign to raise over $336 million, over half of which was to be collected in 1920.[35]

[34] Edwin L. Earp, *The Social Engineer* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1911) ix, xviii, xxii, 13.

[35] [Interchurch World Movement], *Speakers' Manual*, abridged ed. (New York: Interchurch World Movement of North America, 1920) 17-21. The standard account of the Movement is Eldon Ernst, *Moment of Truth for Protestant America: Interchurch Campaigns Following World War I* (Missoula: Scholars' Press, 1974).

The Movement drew upon the enthusiasms and successes of the war years. Just as separate nations had pooled their resources to defeat the Central Powers and just as Americans had bought Liberty Bonds, subscribed to Red Cross drives, and observed "meatless Tuesdays," the Protestant churches would now unite in sacrificial service "to make the kingdoms of this world the kingdoms of our Lord." Yet the Interchurch World Movement was more than a last spasm of wartime fervor. It represented the culmination of trends underway long before the United States had sent its young men to battle the Kaiser: emphasis upon centralized and standardized administration, sophisticated publicity, systematic fund-raising, and scientific expertise. Although the leaders of the Movement denied that they wished to infringe on the prerogatives of denominations, many aspired to create a religious analogue to a well-integrated, efficient business corporation. In an ironic twist to the language of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act (1890) that forbade combinations in restraint of trade, the IWM boldly styled itself a good corporate monopoly—"a combination in restraint of waste." Movement literature spoke of establishing a "joint headquarters" for Protestantism in New York City. Here would find a home "the seventy-five or more international, national, metropolitan and civic religious agencies now inadequately located in almost as many different offices in widely scattered buildings."[36]

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., reinforced the image of the IWM as the headquarters for a corporate Protestantism. A devout Baptist who sat on the Executive Committee and donated large sums to the Movement, Rockefeller wrote and spoke on its behalf. "The Interchurch World Movement," he declared, "gives the best hope that has appeared yet that the wasteful era of ecclesiastical competition is over and that one of ecclesiastical efficiency and co-operation has begun." The old haphazard method of "determining how the work of the Kingdom should be done" was giving way to a scientific, businesslike approach. The IWM started its work "in the same way that every business man developing a new field would commence—by carefully looking over the ground and discovering all the facts in the situation." Having looked over the ground through its surveys, the IWM made it possible "for the first time in the history of Christianity . . . [that the churches might] visualize the whole task that awaits them." Now with the

[36] [Interchurch World Movement], *Speakers' Manual*, 17; [Interchurch World Movement] *World Survey: American Volume*, rev. preliminary ed. (New York: Interchurch Press, 1920) 56; Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 35-49, 91.

facts in hand and with plans synchronized, Protestants could make a united appeal to win the loyalty of a multitude "of good, earnest Christians, who for one reason or another are not definitely affiliated with any particular church." The IWM augured an immense "gain in power—power in numbers, in leadership, and in spirituality." Rockefeller saw in the Movement a herald of national and spiritual rebirth. The IWM was "the greatest force for righteousness that the world has ever known." It would raise up as leaders "the ablest, the broadest, the best-educated men and women, who will recall the early days of the republic." It would "generate such an outpouring of the power of the spirit as the world has never seen since the days of the Apostles." Rockefeller was attempting to do for ecclesiastical life what he and his family had done for the oil industry and higher education: to rationalize and integrate its operations. Yet as his extravagant rhetoric testified, the quest for "efficiency in the Lord's business" was far from the spirit of the stereotypical bloodless bureaucrat. Although Rockefeller was indeed promoting the bureaucratization of American Protestantism, he did so with passion, believing that the restructuring of religious institutions meant nothing less than the salvation of the world. As he wrote for the *Saturday Evening Post* in February 1918, "I see the church molding the thought of the world as it has never done before, leading in all great movements as it should, I see it literally establishing the Kingdom of God on earth."[37]

IV. Legacies

These efforts at kingdom building soon waned dramatically. The Interchurch World Movement swiftly collapsed because its fund-raising drive fell woefully short. By the 1930s, both the foreign missionary drive and the Social Gospel had also lost energy. Divisions within the Protestant house contributed to this result.[38]

Brewing for more than a generation, a conservative backlash against liberal trends in American theology erupted into the so-called fundamentalist controversy of the 1920s. That conflict was a multilayered phenomenon,

[37] John D. Rockefeller, Jr., "Efficiency in the Lord's Business," *New Era Magazine* 26 (June 1920) 418-419. Rockefeller's article in the *Saturday Evening Post* is quoted from Raymond B. Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.: A Portrait* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956) 206. Fosdick, 207-212, treats Rockefeller's involvement in the IWM.

[38] Paul A. Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel, 1920-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956); Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 157-179; Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 146-175.

involving struggle over the Bible, doctrine, and the relationship of science and religion. For many, the fundamentalist controversy also turned on the nature and meaning of God's activity in history. The issue was this: Was time bounded by the purpose of a God who gave it a definitive end beyond itself and beyond human control? Or was time a virtually limitless process that humans could master and whose only goal lay in its own indefinite improvement? The kingdom builders who spun out a plethora of new organizations, professional specializations, and bureaucratic procedures opted decisively for the latter opinion.

By contrast, the rising premillennial party within American Protestantism assessed the possibilities of time very differently. They regarded the current age as hopelessly corrupt and incapable of redemption until the supernatural advent of Christ inaugurated a new heaven and new earth. Accordingly, they often spoke contemptuously of the efforts to build a kingdom of God. Isaac M. Haldeman, a premillennialist pastor in New York City, ridiculed the Interchurch World Movement as an effort to construct "a colossal machine," "to multiply wheels within wheels, to extend the system of internal and humanly created organizations" until the church succumbed to "ecclesiastical sovietism" and a "concentrated dictatorship." The Interchurch campaign ignored the true mandate of the church—to preach Christ to perishing sinners. At the root of this apostate endeavor lay a false eschatology. The IWM, he charged, was "the combined, aggressive effort" of would-be kingdom builders "to render meaningless the last promise of an ascended Lord: 'Surely I come quickly.' "[39]

Although premillennialists constituted only one portion of the fundamentalist coalition that emerged after World War I, they were the most visible and probably the most numerous segment of the movement; and it was chiefly against them that the advocates of kingdom building turned their fire. In a series of articles, books, and pamphlets beginning during World War I and stretching well into the 1920s, moderate and liberal Protestants savagely attacked the premillennial view. Shailer Mathews fired

[39] I. M. Haldeman, *Why I Am Opposed to the Interchurch World Movement* (n.p., n.d.), reprinted in *The Fundamentalist Modernist Conflict: Opposing Views on Three Major Issues*, ed. Joel Carpenter (New York: Garland, 1988) 4, 17, 18, 46. On the fundamentalist controversy and premillennialism, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); and Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982*, enlarged ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

one of the first salvos. In a pamphlet entitled *Will Christ Come Again?* (1917), he accused premillennialists of espousing a "miraculous militarism," a divine reign of terror in which Christ would impose his kingdom by supernatural brute force. The true conception of Christ's reign was the progressive "discovery of God and his laws in social evolution"—a process of development fully congruent with "the growing knowledge of the universe and society given by science."[40] The association of the Christian hope with methodical progress in accord with uniform laws amenable to human control was a consistent theme of the critiques of millenarianism. Methodist Harris Franklin Rall of Garrett Theological Seminary argued that God everywhere worked according to law, for God was a God of regularity and order. "As applied to the development of life upon the earth the scientist calls it [God's uniform law] evolution; as applied to the story of mankind we call it history; as applied to God's supreme purpose we call it the development of the kingdom of God." God worked with unvarying consistency because only "a world of reason and order" would enable humans to be responsible co-workers with the divine to "bring the kingdom of God on earth."[41] Rall's fellow Methodist George Mains echoed the theme. The Bible and scientific study alike prophesied a time "when, under man's trained and culturing hand, the very earth itself . . . shall be transformed into a human paradise." Humankind, by continuing to discover and harness the fundamental laws built into the scheme of things, had "infinite possibilities of development." For those who objected to his vision of a technologically engineered kingdom of God, Mains had a ready rejoinder: "Not all the piety in the world, in the absence of knowledge, could substitute the beneficence of science. Sacrifices do not stop the ravages of plague, incantations do not ward off contagions, and even prayer does not furnish a general cure for tuberculosis."[42]

In another critique of millenarianism, George Eckman provided perhaps the most memorable metaphor for the conviction that the kingdom of God came through the systematic use of humanly contrived instruments.

> When Joshua and his hosts came to the Jordan River, which separated them from the land of Canaan, they were dependent upon a miracle for

[40] Shailer Mathews, *Will Christ Come Again?* (Chicago: American Institute of Sacred Literature, 1917) 4, 6, 13-14, 16, 20, 21.

[41] Harris Franklin Rall, *The Coming Kingdom* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1924) 7-8, 26.

[42] George Preston Mains, *Premillennialism: Non-Scriptural, Non-Historic, Non-Scientific, Non-Philosophical* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1920) 87, 92, 94, 148-149.

their safe crossing of the overflowing stream.... But when the English army came to the Jordan during the recent war no miracle was required for their transit. They threw a steel bridge across the stream and marched their troops over it in due order and redeemed Palestine by the skill of their military engineers. That is a fair type of the business of Christ's church in these days. Christians are to do the work of the Lord by the best means which the inventive genius of man has placed at their disposal. The interests of Christ's kingdom must be set forward as wisely and expeditiously as the commercial or political enterprises of the world at large. Indeed, if the church is alert and sees its actual responsibility, it will quickly excel secular institutions in the shrewdness, business sagacity, and materials with which it does its work.[43]

The shrillness of these diatribes suggests that Mathews, Rall, Mains, and company were perhaps shouting loudly to reassure themselves. Although they rallied an alliance to turn back the challenge of the fundamentalists, many in the liberal and moderate camps were themselves soon reassessing the meaning of the kingdom. Disillusionment following World War I, the economic collapse of 1929, and the growing sense that Protestants had lost the power to mold American culture prompted a sober reassessment of previous hopes. Biblical scholarship, stressing the apocalyptic dimensions of Jesus' teaching, brought nineteenth-century liberal views of the kingdom into disrepute. Indeed liberalism soon found itself embattled on a wide front against a new theological enemy. That foe, usually called neo-orthodoxy (but sometimes termed dialectical theology, the theology of crisis, neo-Reformation theology, or Christian realism), exerted a powerful influence upon American seminaries in the 1930s. More a mood and a common perception of crisis than a single intellectual system, neo-orthodoxy turned with renewed appreciation to Christian themes neglected by nineteenth-century liberalism: the centrality of biblical revelation, the transcendence of God, and the sinfulness of humanity. What this new theological perspective meant for eschatology was succinctly expressed by Drew Seminary's Edwin Lewis in 1941: Notions "about 'bringing in the Kingdom' ... [are] exceedingly remote from the complete Gospel." "There is," said Lewis, "a growing conviction that the New Testament idea of the Kingdom of God cannot be fitted into any naturalistic evolutionary scheme; or into any philosophy

[43] George Eckman, *The Return of the Redeemer* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1920) 257-258.

of history which operates exclusively with the category of divine immanence."[44]

Yet the generation that dreamed of kingdom building through efficient organizations and professional expertise did not simply die without a trace. It bequeathed to its successors numerous legacies, most of them ironic. Perhaps chief of the ironies was that those who had sought to sacralize society inadvertently helped to secularize it. Although they pushed Christians into a host of non-ecclesiastical organizations and professions offering a way of "preaching without pulpits," would-be kingdom builders never intended to supplant Christianity with secular institutions. They saw the kingdom as the great motivational drive shaft without which the civic commissions, the settlement houses, the empirical surveys, and the sociologists' expertise would wither and lose their meaning. Washington Gladden had employed a different metaphor to the same effect. In realizing the kingdom of God, the church, he said, was related to all the secular organizations of society like the brain is connected to the rest of the body: it was the animating and directing influence. Yet in the end, things did not work out this way. Most of the schemes that builders of the kingdom advanced—for example, settlement houses and the social sciences—lost their connection to the religious impulse that had given them birth and became largely secular ventures or disciplines.[45]

Erstwhile liberals also discovered that some of the most inveterate enemies of their ideal of the kingdom could develop into effective practitioners of efficiency and organization. Despite their critique of "colossal machines" and "wheels within wheels," premillennialists often created organizations that were, in Martin Marty's words, "as bureaucratized and rationalized as anything Max Weber was portraying in business and government."[46] Once they lost the battle for denominational machinery in mainline churches, these groups created their own powerful network of organizations that in

[44] Edwin Lewis, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1941) 106, 115-116. On the changed temper of Protestant theology, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "Continental Influence on American Christian Thought Since World War I," *Church History* 27 (September 1958) 256-272; Deane William Ferm, *Contemporary American Theologians: A Critical Survey* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981); and Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 288-311.

[45] Washington Gladden, *The Church and the Kingdom* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1894) 13. The phrase "preaching without pulpits" is from Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920* (New York: Basic Books, 1982) 15. See also George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, eds. *The Secularization of the Academy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Vidich and Lyman, *American Sociology*, esp. 126-148.

[46] Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion*, vol. 1, *The Irony of It All, 1893-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 215.

the long run proved at least as effective as those of their rivals in mobilizing popular support."[47]

Moreover, the kingdom builders had unknowingly undercut their own premises. They espoused efficiency, organization, and professional specialization because they wanted to provide unified, effective expression to American Protestantism's common mind. The reality was more complex. Those who spent their careers working for denominational or interdenominational agencies of the churches frequently acquired perspectives different from people whom they served. Viewing themselves as experts in their respective domains or, alternately, as those who saw most clearly the entire mission of the kingdom, they often sought to shape—not reflect—the mind of the churches. Or as William Adams Brown observed: "The boards are not simply agents to carry out the will of the churches; they are in a very real sense teachers of the Church as to what ought to be done."[48]

Perhaps the best example of this dynamic was the career of the Federal Council of Churches. At the 1908 meeting, the organization's president declared: "It is the voice of many millions that speaks here to-day like the voice of many waters." In reality, the seventeen million Protestant Christians nominally federated in the Council did not take much notice of it, as unpaid pledges from member denominations attested. It was not the united conscience of the constituent bodies that spoke through the Council. Limited in resources, the Council increasingly recognized that it could not yet function as a coordinator of the churches' total work. "For a time," FCC administrator Charles Macfarland later remembered, "the council was evidently to be mainly a state of mind." He concluded that the Council ought to take a more limited purview and concentrate "on issues where the churches needed creative leadership," especially in the field of social witness. What had begun as a self-proclaimed united front for Protestants instead became a holding company for a series of quasi-independent study commissions and "experts" lobbying on behalf of certain perspectives and policies. Since this advocacy met resistance from many rank-and-file ministers and churchgoers, the FCC exacerbated differences within Protestantism and was often

[47] Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Joel A. Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism,1929-1942," *Church History* 49 (March 1980) 62-75; William Vance Trollinger, Jr., *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

[48] William Adams Brown, *The Church in America: A Study of the Present Condition and Future Prospects of American Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1922) 234.

perceived by many as a distant bureaucracy alienated from its own base of support.[49]

This dissonance between goal and result pointed to a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the efficiency movement. Its advocates assumed that the reign of the experts would support popular participation and express the common mind. But as John Higham has sagely observed: "Technical organization is essentially undemocratic. Not equal rights but the hierarchical articulation of differentiated functions is its working principle. The more complex the knowledge required for maintaining a system, the further the professional expert is detached from the common life and the more the centers of power are hidden from public view."[50]

Perhaps the most significant legacy of the kingdom-building efficiency movement is disclosed by asking a simple question: Efficiency to what end? In the writings of advocates of the movement, one gets hints at a disturbing answer. Efficiency, wrote one author in 1917, is not "perfected once and forever but [is] an organic process which should constantly advance toward perfection." Thus he suggested that every congregation have an efficiency committee to subject all programs to ongoing scrutiny and change.[51] Similarly, one piece of literature published by the Interchurch World Movement argued for "a continuous survey," "a continuous adaptation . . . in plans," "a continuous campaign of education and publicity."[52]

In such lines, one senses that the search for an efficient Christianity was becoming self-referential, ceaseless motion. Unfortunately the kingdom-building ideas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offered meager theological resources for a critique of these self-referential activities, for at the heart of the kingdom was the notion of never-ending process. Thus William Newton Clarke declared that Christ's "coming is not an event, it is a process that includes innumerable events, a perpetual advance of Christ in the activity of his kingdom."[53] Clarke's student Walter Rauschenbusch made the same point: "An eschatology which is expressed in

[49] Sanford, *Federal Council*, 207; Charles S. Macfarland, *Christian Unity in the Making: The First Twenty-Five Years of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, 1905-1930* (New York: Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, 1948) 54, 55, 57, 63-64, 66-67, 78, 79, 84-85.

[50] John Higham, "Hanging Together: Divergent Unities in American History," *Journal of American History* 61 (June 1974) 26.

[51] Albert F. McGarrah, *Modern Church Finance: Its Principles and Practice* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1916) 86.

[52] [Interchurch World Movement], *World Survey: American Volume*, rev. preliminary ed. (New York: Interchurch Press, 1920) 44.

[53] William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology*, 18th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909) 446.

terms of historic development has no final consummation. Its consummations are always the basis for further development. The Kingdom of God is always coming. . . . The life of the race is in its growth."[54] Largely devoid of the sense of a definitive end for history, kingdom-building theology made the processes of the kingdom the goal of the kingdom. This view of history fit into a larger pattern of thought common in both Europe and America after 1870. Central to that outlook was, in James T. Kloppenberg's words, an understanding of "knowledge as an unending experiment whose results can be validated only in activity rather than reflection, and whose conclusions are at best provisional and subject always to further testing in practice."[55] This pragmatic, tentative view did not provide a transcendent bar of justice before which processes, whether bureaucratic or otherwise, might be brought to judgment.

These matters are of abiding significance. We who live in the late twentieth century witness a seemingly endless restructuring of agencies in mainline churches, and all about us we encounter multitudes who harbor deep resentment toward allegedly distant, unresponsive bureaucracies, whether religious or secular. Talk about "bringing in the kingdom" may have long ago become passé, but those who coined that vocabulary helped legitimate a major organizational transformation posing questions and problems that remain very much with us.

[54] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978) 227.

[55] James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought*, 1870-1920 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 65. The waning sense of a definitive end was also manifest in changing views of death and the afterlife. Protestants increasingly regarded death as merely a step in the eternal progression of the human spirit. See my article " 'As Though Nothing at All Had Happened': Death and Afterlife in Protestant Thought," *Soundings* 67 (Winter 1984) 453-471.

Eschatological Sanctions and Christian Ethics

by Ted Peters

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The problem that gives rise to the question of the relation between eschatology and ethics can be identified in my favorite limerick.

> God created the world in the beginning,
> but we humans spoiled it by sinning.
> We know that the story
> will end in God's glory;
> but right now the other side's winning.

Right now, while the other side's winning, what should we do? Why? And how does God's future glory have an impact on who we are today?

The central question of this article is this: what sanctions the Christian life? More specifically, can we think of our eschatological vision of God's glory as sanctioning the life of beatitude and its expression in works of love?

Answering this question is made complicated because of two subquestions, each of which introduces a bifurcation. The first subquestion is this: should ethical sanctions be extrinsic or intrinsic? The most common form of *extrinsic sanction* is the promise of reward or the threat of punishment, and in eschatological terms it employs the promise of heaven and the threat of hell. In such a reward-punishment scheme the ethical sanction is extrinsic—at least initially extrinsic—to the ethical character we are trying to cultivate. It is heteronomous with regard to the person because the sanction comes from the outside, drawing the ethical person to counteract his or her own innate dispositions in behalf of the moral good projected by the sanction. Ethics is here understood in terms of actions or works that may or may not be expressions of a deep personal character already oriented toward righteousness. When we speak of an *intrinsic sanction*, in contrast, we think of an ethical warrant that is somehow built in both to the good work in question and to the person who behaves ethically. Works of love emerge from a personal character that is already oriented toward righteousness. Intrinsic sanctions presume that we are autonomous in the sense that good works are automatic self-expressions of a self already rooted in the good

toward which extrinsic sanctions attempt to draw us.[1] Is Christian ethics extrinsic? Intrinsic? Both?

The second subquestion is this: what is the relation between future and present? Are ethical sanctions derived from future consequences or present realities? If future consequences, does this necessarily make sanctions extrinsic—that is, temporally extrinsic? If present realities, does this necessarily cut off the relation between sanctions and the future? In order to think of sanctions as intrinsic, must we jettison the eschatological future? Should we seek our ethical warrant only in the present tense, only in a dimension of reality intrinsic to the self who acts in the here and now? If we pursue intrinsic sanctions, does this mean we have to defuturize our eschatology?

My own answer will be a constructive one: *we should think of the eschatological future of God as the ultimate sanction.* This yields a number of corollaries. First, our vision of God's future as the ultimate sanction leaves room for other penultimate sanctions such as common sense and human wisdom. Second, eschatology so understood should retain its future orientation and not be collapsed into a mythical form of thinking about strictly present realities. Third, it is possible to think of a future sanction as intrinsic to us in the present if we think in terms of prolepsis. The concept of prolepsis enables us to envision God's ultimate future in the present tense, as present to us ahead of time in the form of anticipation. Fourth, the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount seem to describe a life imbued with the proleptic presence of God's eschatological future. We can conclude that the life of beatitude is sanctioned by an intrinsic yet eschatological understanding.

Essential here is allowing our eschatology to be informed by the apocalyptic vision.[2] There are two worlds, the present aeon and the future new

[1] I use the term heteronomy here to refer to a law that comes from outside the self. If the self is naturally oriented toward sin, then God's law comes in heteronomous form to call the self to transformation. If, on the other hand, the self is already oriented toward the good, then any heteronomous law may appear as an alien authority, as repressive. According to Paul Tillich, heteronomy imposes a strange (ἕτερος) law (νόμος) that alienates. We ordinarily contrast heteronomy with autonomy. Autonomy does not mean the freedom of the individual to be a law unto himself or herself, says Tillich; rather it means that a person is obedient to the law of reason that lies within. Autonomy indicates that the law—would this apply to moral law as well as the law of reason?—is intrinsic to the self and not merely extrinsic. Theonomy is Tillich's third term of the triangle, indicating that the ground of both the law and the self is God, and that the expression of the law by the self is simultaneously divine self-expression (*Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-1963] 1.83-85).

[2] Two decades ago Carl E. Braaten cheerfully acknowledged the decisive role played by the apocalyptic vision in presenting the New Testament Jesus; and he sought to make "it the point of departure and of central significance for systematic theology today" ("The Significance of Apoc-

creation. Yet, the two aeons are not totally separated, as if the present aeon must completely disappear before the new one begins. The eschatological message of the gospel is that the future new reality has broken into the old, that the new creation has manifested itself within the present creation in the person of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. The life of beatitude lives from the power of the proleptic presence of God's future.

With regard to what follows, Amos Wilder's work is key. His book of sixty years ago, *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus*, triggers all sorts of questions about the relationship between our ultimate destinies and our moral life. I want in part to rewalk the path on which Wilder has led us. Then I would like to open a gate or two so that we can hike on into new territory. The path we take here will bypass the thicket of discussion prompted by critics such as John Dominic Crossan, whose agenda is to ask whether Amos Wilder deals with the teachings of the actual historical Jesus or just those of the writer of the Gospel of Matthew.[3] Rather than remain with the question of the historical Jesus, we will push on to our destination: constructive theology. Where we want to end up is with illumination regarding the structure of Christian ethics with a special eye to the eschatological significance of beatitudinal living.

I. Ethical Sanctions

For the purposes of this inquiry I will take the work of Amos Wilder as my point of departure. Wilder defined an ethical sanction as "any objective consideration, tacit or expressed, that enforces a moral imperative."[4] Sanctions prompt obedience.

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alypticism for Systematic Theology," *Interpretation* 25 [October 1971] 482). In my judgment, Braaten was on the right track. "The key term is *proleptic*," writes Braaten; "there is a proleptic presence of the eschatological kingdom in the activity of Jesus. The kingdom of God which is really future retains its futurity in the very historical events which anticipate it in the present. . . . Ethical actions are real, although never more than provisional representations of the ontologically prior and eschatologically future kingdom" (*Eschatology and Ethics* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974] 110-111).

[3] John Dominic Crossan, *A Fragile Craft: The Work of Amos Niven Wilder* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981) 11-25; and Amos N. Wilder, *The Bible and the Literary Critic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 104-110.

[4] Amos N. Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939, rev. ed. 1950) 87. We follow Wilder here who uses the term "sanction" broadly to refer to moral justification both for human acts or works and for developing the human character that disposes us to live and act morally. Ordinarily the term "sanction" refers only to acts or works by denoting the authority by which an action is justified; and it usually denotes rules or laws accompanied by penalties and rewards. Moral sanctions result in praise or blame, and political or legal sanctions result in forceful coercion. See James F. Childress, "Sanction," in *The Westminster*

Wilder prefers the term "sanction" to that of "motive." On the one hand, the idea of motive is too general because it applies to any kind of human action, not strictly moral action. On the other hand, the concept of motive is too limited because it seems restricted to affective or subjective grounds for action such as fear, love, gratitude, and such. The concept of sanction, in contrast, has the advantage of going beyond subjective motives to the objective and impersonal aspects of ethical reasoning.[5]

Sanctions can be either extrinsic or intrinsic. Extrinsic sanctions provide grounds for moral action that are external to the human will. The most common form is the promise of reward or the threat of punishment. When one's employer says, "if you do a good job you'll get a salary increase and a promotion," we have an example of a positive extrinsic sanction. This turns to a negative extrinsic sanction when the boss says, "if you do not do a good job you'll get fired or, even worse, you'll lose your reserved parking space." The assumption here is that our human wills are not naturally inclined toward doing a good job, so external or extrinsic consequences are designed to stimulate motivation for proper action.

Intrinsic sanctions, in contrast, presume an affinity between the human will and the ethical maxim. When we say, "virtue is its own reward," we might mean that our desire to do good is intrinsic to who we are, that our motive for virtuous action is built in. Intrinsic sanctions appeal to a quality presumed to be already present in the human person. No extrinsic structure of reward or punishment is required to stimulate moral action.

Let us ask: are eschatological sanctions extrinsic or intrinsic? At first it would appear that they are strictly extrinsic, depending on the attractiveness of heaven or the dread of hell. Yet, as I hope to show, eschatological ethics can also be thought of as intrinsic—that is, the eschatological future can sanction moral action in the present if thought of beatitudinally or proleptically. Proleptic ethics is both future and present, both extrinsic and intrinsic.

II. Heaven and Hell: Extrinsic Eschatological Sanctions

What strikes us first when looking at the link between eschatology and ethics is its dualistic structure, especially the consequences of punishment

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Dictionary of Christian Ethics, ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986) 562-563.

[5] "It is important to distinguish justifying reasons from motivating reasons for action. . . . Justifying reasons are the ones that the agent invokes to indicate why the act is right. . . . But the action may be motivated by other moral or nonmoral reasons" (James F. Childress, "Motives and Motivation," in *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, 407). It appears that Wilder's use of "sanction" has justifying reasoning in mind, yet it also motivates insofar as it prompts obedience from within.

or reward. In the Sermon on the Mount we find Matthew's Jesus appealing to the threat of punishment in hell.

> For I tell you, unless your righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.[6]
>
> You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool," you will be liable to the hell of fire (Mt. 5:20-22).

Or, "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell" (Mt. 5:30).

This is what Karl Rahner calls "threat disclosure."[7] It presumes that our internal human disposition is not essentially oriented toward righteousness, so that external persuasion is required. Our own self-interest is not identical to the interest of righteousness, so the extrinsic sanction—the threat of hell—is necessary to connect righteousness with our own inner desire to avoid hell. The threat of hell is extrinsic in the double sense that it is external both to the character of the righteousness called for—punishment and suffering are not in themselves the good that defines righteousness—and, at least initially, is external to our self's inner inclination or affinity to righteousness.

The threat of hell constitutes a negative sanction. The promise of heaven is more positive. Heaven is a great treasure, and if we desire to be rich we will desire heaven. The means for getting this heaven is works of righteousness. Heaven is a reward for good works.

> Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them: for then you have no reward from your father in heaven.

[6] The term normally rendered "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη) can also be translated "justice" (even "justification") which, according to Seán Freyne, means "radical concern for human need wherever and in whatever form it is encountered" ("The Ethic of Jesus: The Sermon on the Mount Then and Now" in *Ethics and the Christian*, ed. Seán Freyne [Dublin: Columa Press, 1991] 53).

[7] "What Scripture says about hell is to be interpreted in keeping with its literary character of 'threat-discourse' and hence not to be read as a preview of something which will exist some day" (Karl Rahner, "Hell," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner [New York: Crossroad, 1975] 603). It seems to me that "threat discourse" could apply regardless of whether it is a preview of a hell that will actually exist or merely a "metaphorical" expression "for something radically not of this world."

> So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let the left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Mt. 6:1-4).

This is a positive eschatological sanction; because heaven is both a positive draw and it is eschatological.

A more apocalyptic variant is Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats in the little apocalypse of Matthew 25. The tie between secrecy and good works continues when the Son of Man, the judge on his throne of glory, lists acts of mercy that the virtuous themselves hardly remember performing: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned. To the sheep who perform such works of righteousness he says, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 15:34). The goats who failed to perform such works of mercy he consigns to the opposite. This presupposes a double eschatological destiny. "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Mt. 25:46).

Do extrinsic eschatological sanctions appeal to human self-interest? It would seem so. Such an ethic presupposes that the human will is curved in on itself, so any effective prod to righteousness—understanding righteousness as loving God or loving neighbor—must appeal finally to self-interest. It is in our own best interest to end up in heaven and avoid hell; and, if living righteously is the appropriate means to this end, then we will live righteously. Does this imply that we could live righteously without undergoing the transformation of the self promised by God's kingdom, without the sanctifying renewal of the Holy Spirit? Does this imply a decisionist or actionist type of ethic that sanctions certain works without regard to the transformation of the self curved in upon itself or without regard for the development of righteous character in the person of faith? It would appear so.

Wilder does not like this extrinsic structure. Eschatological sanctions seem to remain extrinsic both to the ethical actions and to the self who is acting. Wilder, in contrast, believes that disciples of Jesus need to engage in repentance, in μετάνοια, and seek transformation of themselves. A self that is transformed will then experience the will of God as intrinsic. The repen-

tance he calls for here is not one of extreme renunciation of the world, not one of asceticism. Rather, Wilder believes Jesus advocates "a repentance ethic in the sense that it calls for 'fruits worthy of repentance,'—that is, conduct evidencing the changed disposition ... a new-covenant ethic. It is not primarily an ethic for the relations and conduct of the future transcendental Kingdom."[8] Wilder demands a changed character, a transformed self prior to our gaining an inner appreciation for Jesus' ethical teaching. Yet this demand seems out of conformity with what Jesus himself says. An intrinsic sanction contingent upon the transformed self seems somewhat marginalized by Jesus' teachings about heaven and hell, and also by what follows here, namely, Jesus' appeal to common sense as an ethical sanction.

III. Common Sense: Intrinsic Non-Eschatological Sanctions

Jesus did not always appeal to reward in heaven and punishment in hell to sanction righteousness. In fact, on occasion he so emphasized divine grace and mercy that the reward-punishment scheme became obviated. Parables such as the laborers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-6), the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32), and the Pharisee and the Publican (Lk. 18:19-24) stress that divine blessing issues from God's grace out of proportion to what we have deserved by our virtuous living. The question regarding the relation between human works and divine grace is not the one we want to address directly here, however.

Our question has to do with ethical sanctions; and it is interesting to note that on some occasions, especially in Matthew, Jesus appeals to good ol' common sense, to what Wilder calls "sapiential" sanctions—that is, Jesus appeals to human wisdom. In aphoristic style Jesus says, "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Mt. 26:52), or, "if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into the pit" (Mt. 15:14). The appeal here is not to reward or punishment. Nor is the appeal to an eschatological measure.[9]

[8] Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics*, 160; see 209. What Wilder prefers here looks like what some refer to as an "ethics of character." Differing from a deontological or teleological ethical system that justifies decisions and actions, the focus here is on the character of a person or on a community oriented toward the good over time. A good character expresses itself in virtuous living. If we begin with an unrighteous self curved in upon itself, then transformation of character is called for. The "Christian claim [is] that faith in Christ along with God's grace have a transforming effect on human nature in general and on each Christian in particular, and that such transformation is at least potentially visible over time in individuals and communities" (Richard Bondi, "Character," in *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, 83).

[9] Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics*, 106.

Rather, Jesus relies upon a certain wisdom that a keen observer of the human phenomenon is likely to acknowledge.

That Jesus relies upon our native human ability to discriminate between what is wise and what is unwise is exemplified in his teaching regarding sabbath observance.

> A man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?" so that they might accuse him. He said to them, "Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath" (Mt. 12:10-12).

Here in the face of an apparent conflict with divine law, Matthew's Jesus affirms the law while appealing as well to common sense: how much more is a human being worth than a sheep! "Even the appeal to the Scriptures," says Wilder, "is subservient to this appeal to the reason."[10] Rather than a coercive threat of hell, Jesus here is making an appeal to common sense. Rather than presume that our inner human disposition is to live unrighteously, Jesus here is counting on our own innate capacity for common sense to see the wisdom in sabbath healing. Jesus demonstrates confidence in our "native insight and moral responsiveness."[11]

Not very hidden here, of course, is sanction by appeal to authority—that is, to the authority of the scriptures, of the law and the prophets. What is the relation of common sense to authority? "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets," Jesus reminds us; "I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17). And he proceeds to warn us with extrinsic eschatological sanctions: "Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:19). Yet, this is no simple literalism, no simple legalism. Jesus proceeds to appeal to his own authority when interpreting the law, saying, "but I say to you. . . ." And, in the case of sabbath healing, he presumes that the listener too, when appealing to common sense, imparts a certain spiritual discernment to the process of sanctioning righteousness. Wilder comments, "Jesus' use of the Scriptures is

[10] Ibid., 117.

[11] Ibid., 118. Tillich would call this appeal to our native disposition to see things reasonably "autonomy." "Autonomy means the obedience of the individual to the law of reason, which he finds in himself as a rational being" (*Systematic Theology*, 1.84).

represented less as a decisive court of appeals than as an arsenal from which to fortify his own and his hearers' personal discernment in things spiritual and ethical."[12]

If we take a closer look at sanction by common sense, Wilder's analysis reveals most frequently a two-step process. Jesus' appeals to common sense are frequently arguments by analogy. The rhetorical digression regarding the relative value of a sheep and a human being draws our attention toward an analogy; it only indirectly relates to the original question regarding healing on the sabbath. Once the justice of the sheep-rescue analogy becomes obvious, then we must embark on the second step, namely, to apply it to the moral question of sabbath observance. Moral discernment may begin with the common-sense analogy, but it must proceed by asking about the propriety of the analogy for the actual ethical issue at hand. This is Jesus' indirect use of common sense as ethical sanction.

Jesus also employs common sense directly. Perhaps the premier example is the Golden Rule: "do to others as you would have them do to you" (Lk. 6:31; cf. Mt. 7:12).[13] Jesus can count on the obvious logic of the aphorism to be convincing. Along with Hillel in the Talmud and with sages in various cultural epochs, Confucius formulated a version of the Golden Rule and called it the principle of reciprocity: "do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you."[14] This principle does not seem to be dependent upon a special revelation to Israel. Rather, it comes from the light of natural reason; it comes from the articulated wisdom of sages who have been keen observers of the human condition.[15]

If we are to make sense out of common sense, we must presume it is the

[12] Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics*, 132.

[13] Matthew's text adds that the Golden Rule "is the law and the prophets." This might be construed as an appeal to the authority of the law and the prophets, or, perhaps better, as a conflation of common sense with authority. "The Golden Rule, while it involves sanctions of Scriptures which it summarizes in Mt.'s form, is counted on really to carry its own conviction" (Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics*, 118).

[14] Confucius *Analects* 15:23.

[15] Any serious or extensive Christian ethic based on common sense would have to elaborate a form of "natural law" positing a *iustitia originalis* which, in the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, "is not completely lost in the Fall but remains with sinful man as the knowledge of what he ought to be, as the law of his freedom" (*Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols. [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941-1942] 1.280). Yet, the appeal of common sense to an original justice still operative in the human soul is insufficient for a full ethic for two reasons. First, any articulation of our common sense of justice will be contaminated by the poisons of the fall, by the corrupting orientation to the present aeon. Niebuhr goes on to say that, "There is therefore no uncorrupted natural law, just as there is no completely lost original justice" (Ibid., 1.281). Second, the Christian ethic is oriented toward a redeemed order, toward the new aeon; and this finally requires on our part a transformation and renewal. It begins with eschatological justice, not original justice.

sense we share in common as human beings. Would this apply to the human self prior to repentance and transformation? Would common sense lying within us count as the point of appeal, as our natural disposition to hear the call to repentance and transformation? Do Jesus' sanctions apply only to those disciples already transformed, or can they appeal to any person of wisdom and reasonably good will?

In the history of Christian preaching, we can find examples of appeals both to intrinsic common-sense sanctions as well as extrinsic eschatological sanctions. In his sermon of May 18, 1539, Martin Luther addresses the problem of excessive drinking and intoxication. He begins with a direct appeal to common sense.

> If you are tired and downhearted, take a drink; but this does not mean being a pig and doing nothing but gorging and swilling. . . .
>
> God does not forbid you to drink as do the Turks. He permits you to drink wine and beer; he does not make a law of it. But do not make a pig of yourself; remain a human being. If you are a human being, then keep your human self-control.

The appeal to human reason here relies upon our natural inclination to value self-control. Yet, Luther fears that the appeal to human reason alone might not have sufficient force to effect the desired result. So he proceeds to appeal to an eschatological sanction, namely, the threat of hell.

> A drunkard is not dissuaded from his drinking by reason any more than a murderer, an adulterer, whoremonger, or usurer; therefore, you will not be moved by the reasons that excessive drinking weakens the constitution, consumes money and goods, and causes the Italians, Turks, and the English to spit upon us. What should move you is that God forbids it on pain of damnation and loss of the kingdom of heaven.[16]

IV. God's Nature, God's Glory: Intrinsic Non-Eschatological Sanctions?

God is perfect. Our perfect actions imitate or express God's perfection. This sanctions righteous living. Yet the very nature of God—the very nature of God's perfection—stands in contradiction to common sense, in contradiction to the natural light of human reason.

[16] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1955-1986) 51.294-296 passim.

> You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt. 5:43-48; see Lk. 6:27-36).

In this profound passage the Sermon on the Mount carries us to a vision beyond that of the Golden Rule, beyond reciprocity, beyond merely doing to others what we would expect them to do to us. Common sense may be good enough for tax collectors or Gentiles, but it is not good enough for Jesus. Common sense tells us to love our friends and hate our enemies. It is rewarding to love those who love us in return. It is dangerous to love those who might harm us. So it seems counterintuitive to assert that the God of Jesus loves enemies—that is, he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. Yet, says Jesus, if we are to be like God, we are to love our enemies as well. God is not human. God's nature bursts beyond the limits of human wisdom. For us to be God-like we too must burst beyond the limits of common sense. And, curiously, Jesus seems to be assuming that his listeners are disposed toward being like God. The sanction for loving one's enemies is the appeal to God's nature as a lover of enemies.[17]

Even though we have taken a step beyond common sense here, both the

[17] Paul Ricoeur raises to dramatic pitch the tension between the Golden Rule, on the one hand, and the injunction to love our enemies, on the other. Are they contradictory? After all, the Golden Rule relies upon a *logic of equivaleuce* or rule of reciprocity according to which justice means that what we give and what we get are equivalent; but loving one's enemies requires a *logic of superabuudance* wherein the one who loves gives regardless of just return. The tension can be resolved if we give priority to the latter and interpret the former accordingly. Ricoeur calls this the "economy of gift" and focuses on the word *because: "because* it has been given to you, go and do alike." Rather than act toward others "in order to" obtain our just reward, we love others "because" God has loved us. This redeems the rule of reciprocity by grace. Ricoeur writes, "I do not claim that love for enemies, held as the touchstone of the logic of superabundance, and the Golden Rule, held as the highest expression of the logic of equivalence, coincide. The one is unilateral. The other is bilateral . . . my main point—is that the tension between them is essential and central to genuine Christian ethics." By this he means that, as in the case of a paradox, the logic of superabundance at first disorients us—it disorients us because it is supra-ethical, not ethical. This disorientation allows us to become aligned to God's grace, and then we return to the practical sphere of living ethically by imbuing the Golden Rule with self-giving love. "The socalled Christian ethics—or, I should prefer to say, the common ethics in a religious perspective—relies to my mind on this *teusiou* between unilateral love and bilateral justice" ("The Golden Rule: Exegetical and Theological Perplexities," *New Testament Studies* 36 [1990] 392-397).

appeal to common sense and the appeal to God's nature have something in common. In both cases the nature of the ethical life—"be perfect"—and the logic of the ethical sanction—"as your heavenly Father is perfect"—are intrinsically tied together. We need not seek a sanction external to the moral logic at work here. Furthermore, we can presume that something within the human soul resonates with the ethical injunction; we want to be like God. What does not compute—that is, what runs counter to common sense—is that to be like God we need to love our enemies. Yet the appeal to our presumed intrinsic desire to be like God stands in sharp contrast with the scheme of reward and punishment, wherein the reward of heaven or the punishment of hell is extrinsic—that is, the sanctions of heaven and hell are distanciated from the ethical life itself. Extrinsic sanctions make the ethical life into a means toward a further end—perhaps even a selfish end—namely, reward and avoidance of punishment. Jesus' reliance upon God's nature when sanctioning enemy love, in contrast, appeals not to our natural human propensity toward self-interest but rather to an assumed propensity within us to desire God-likeness. Jesus presumes that we want to be like God; and it is in the nature of God to love enemies. The sanction and the ethical injunction to righteousness are one.

As Wilder presses the appeal to God's nature as an ethical sanction, he focuses particularly on God's glory. Divine glory is the final sanction. The clearest use of this sanction is found in the Sermon on the Mount. "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:16).

Wilder points out how the appeal to divine glory reverberates throughout the Old Testament (Pss. 22:23; 86:9-10) and that the Lord's Prayer includes the important petition, "Hallowed be thy name." By emphasizing divine glory, Wilder wants to say that God is God, God defines divinity, and this in itself supplies the intrinsic sanction for all action within creation. More than identifying a discrete quality in God's nature—such as enemy love—it is the sheer Godness of God that provides the ultimate sanction.

> Here, rather than the righteousness or the bounty of God, it is the majesty of God that is invoked. Here, rather than imitation or gratitude, it is reverence that is called for. Here it is the nature of God not in respect of some attribute that has affinity with human virtues, but in its essential divine quality that is urged: in its majesty, sanctity, hallowedness, glory, power. . . .

> The simplest expression of this ethical motivation is as follows: Do the will of God because he is supremely great.[18]

Now, what do we have here? We have the most sublime of intrinsic sanctions: the appeal to God's glory. And, at first glance, this would appear to be the furthest removed from where we started, from extrinsic eschatological sanctions. Yet, Wilder begins to lead us full circle by knotting together divine glory with eschatology.

> This emphasis on the glory and power of God is closely related to the eschatological sanction. They both spring from an overpowering sense of the august reign of God. The eschatological anticipation just goes a step further and sees this same power in imminent action of judgment. The call to hallow the Name springs from the sense that all power and rule is lodged with God and all obedience is due him.[19]

The Lord's Prayer is key here. By praying for the hallowing of God's name we make ourselves ready to do the will of God. This constitutes an ethical imperative, whose sanction is the ascription of the reign and the glory to God, and this hallowing is closely tied to the advent of the eschatological reign: "Thy kingdom come." This leads to the central Wilder thesis:

> The nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven, viewed both as promise and as menace, is the dominant sanction for righteousness.
>
> This dominant eschatological sanction is, however, a formal sanction, secondary to, if closely related to, the essential sanction.
>
> The essential sanction for righteousness is the nature of God.[20]

I contend that the power and glory of God come to full quiddity in God's eschatological reign. To be one with God is to be one with God's eschatological future. This places us on the brink of the concept of beatitude. But before tackling beatitude directly, let us take note of what Wilder says about the mythological nature of New Testament eschatology.

According to Wilder, the eschatological scheme is a mythological fiction. Although to the Jewish community at the time of Jesus the drama of divine holiness and anticipation of impending judgment seemed real, "they should

[18] Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics*, 123-124.
[19] Ibid., 126.
[20] Ibid., 133.

never be taken in a crass sense. The apocalyptic ideas are 'fictions'."[21] Underlying these fictions is a reality, of course; it is the reality of Israel's experience with the holiness and power of God combined with the sense of judgment we feel when measuring ourselves against divine holiness and glory. Exactly what precipitates the move from this underlying experience to its articulation in the form of eschatological fiction goes unmentioned in Wilder's historical analysis. Yet, Wilder is confident that the extrinsic eschatological sanctions we find in the text are fictions. "As fictions, it follows that, however vividly they might compel the imagination of the eschatologist, they could never serve as a final and determinative sanction. A fiction however vivid and compelling has not the substance to serve this purpose."[22]

Having said this, Wilder then tries to account for the double destiny built into eschatological sanctioning. Why is it that we end up with both heaven and hell, both the saved and the damned? The answer, says Wilder, is that there existed stages of development from the underlying experience to the establishment of the eschatological fiction, and "by these stages we thus pass from the sphere of essential sanction to that of retributive sanction, and from disinterested or impulsive virtue to calculative virtue."[23] What are these stages? We start with the appeal to common-sense reasoning based upon an underlying experience with God. Common wisdom then evokes a moral order in which consequences are patent and inescapable. The idea of consequences in turn leads to that of penalties for actions of folly and blindness. At a later stage of deeper insight, this sapiential sanction based upon discernment of natural and social consequences begins to pass over into a truly religious sanction—that is, to a discernment of divine retributions. The final step is taken when this notion of divine retribution becomes dramatized and dogmatized in a scheme of eschatological rewards and punishments.

On the one hand, Wilder seems to be sympathetic to the inherent logic of human wisdom as it develops stage by stage from an authentic experience with God to the production of eschatological fictions. He admits that heaven and hell "are not merely arbitrary lures and menaces, arbitrary incentives. They stand for inevitable consequences."[24] Yet, on the other hand, Wilder seems to be giving priority to the point of departure, as if the boat should never have left the dock.

[21] Ibid., 134.
[22] Ibid., 134.
[23] Ibid., 136.
[24] Ibid., 137.

We note what Wilder has accomplished here. First, he has defuturized the eschatological sanctions.[25] By this defuturizing Wilder can declare against Albert Schweitzer that Jesus does not teach an "interim ethic." Rather, this is an ethics of the new covenant, an ethics of discipleship.[26] Second, by dubbing the eschatological sanctions fictions, and by asserting that fictions are themselves too weak to bear the load of ethical sanction, he eliminates all competition in the race to become the essential or fundamental ethical sanction. The winning prize now belongs indisputably to Wilder's favorite, the nature or glory of God.[27] Eschatological sanctions are merely formal and hence secondary to the primary and essential sanction, the nature of

[25] "The apocalyptic event in the future is essentially of the character of myth, and the interim thus created is formal and conceptual rather than real" (Ibid., 182). Wilder could find a fellow traveler in Rudolf Bultmann, for whom the eschatological vision is mythological and hence subject to existentialist interpretation (*Jesus Christ and Mythology* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958] 14-18). Now, does this dubbing of eschatology as myth necessarily require defuturizing it? Not all interpreters will sacrifice the reality of the future. Wolfhart Pannenberg, for example, requires the future for Jesus to be who he claims he is. "The tension between present and future in Jesus' proclamation makes the proleptic character of Jesus' claim apparent; that is, Jesus' claim means an anticipation of a confirmation that is to be expected only from the future" (*Jesus—God and Man*, 2d ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977] 58). Similarly, in the case of St. Paul, J. Christiaan Beker contends against the view that "the apocalyptic worldview [is] a husk or a purely contingent symbol, [rather] it constitutes the master-symbol for the interpretation of the gospel" (*The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul's Thought* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990] xii). Beker's overall approach to Paul's writings posits two axioms dialectically related: "the contingent particularity of his hermeneutic and his profound understanding of the coherent structure of the gospel" (Ibid., 113). Significant here is that for Beker the "future orientation" belongs to "Paul's coherent center" (Ibid., xii).

[26] Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics*, 160, 176. Richard H. Hiers, convinced that a fair reading of the Synoptic Gospels demonstrates convincingly that Jesus' teaching was apocalyptically structured and that his eschatology requires a still-outstanding future, is critical of Amos Wilder and others who reject Albert Schweitzer's interim ethics in favor of some version of realized eschatology. The problem is not that in some sense God's kingdom is present, insists Hiers. Defending Schweitzer, Hiers writes, "The interim ethics theory is not discredited by claiming that in some way or to some degree the Kingdom of God was present. Even if it was partly present or actualized, its decisive future manifestation, along with the Judgment, remained to occur. In the meantime, life was to be lived in the interim" (*Jesus and the Future* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981] 58). Having noted this, we also note that Hiers does not advocate an eschatological ethics for our modern world. Hiers contends that Jesus' futuristic belief was for an eschatology within his own generation, and he was mistaken. The eschaton did not arrive. Therefore, his interim ethics cannot be our interim ethics. "Jesus did not intend his ethics for us; but his sayings and parables may nevertheless have meaning for us. The basic triadic relationship, God-neighbor-self, is essentially the same now as in his time. Jesus' understanding that God desires and requires compassion or affirmative caring for others, is not contingent upon the expectation that history is about to end. The fact that Jesus' ethics was 'interim ethics' does not mean that his moral message is without meaning in our time. All ethics is interim ethics. Each person lives within the quite finite span of his or her own lifetime" (Ibid., 107).

[27] "Their true sanction evidently is something else: whatever lies behind the symbolic picture of Judgment. This something else, the true sanction, is the fact of God and his nature and his will with men as assented to by the discernment of mind and heart" (Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics*, 187).

God.[28] Wilder can justify this in part because eschatological sanctions are extrinsic, selfish, and consequential; whereas appeal to the nature of God is intrinsic, relying upon a renewed relation of the self to God, a transformed self that characterizes a disciple of Jesus.[29] The weakness this scriptural interpretation bequeaths to systematic theologians and ethicists, in my judgment, is that it inadvertently sacrifices the temporal component. It collapses ethical sanctioning into the present moment. I believe Wilder would have served us better had he appealed to the notion of beatitude understood proleptically, wherein he could have preserved the tie between the eschatological future and intrinsic sanctions. To the notion of beatitude we now turn.

V. Beatitude

Like proverbs the beatitudes are brief, dense, evocative, memorable. But they are much more. They carry an innate elegance and beauty that gives them uncanny spiritual and moral force. New Testament commentator Robert H. Smith says the beatitudes

> stand at the head of the Sermon on the Mount like fabulous carved lions at the entrance of a sanctuary. They send shudders up the spine, fill the heart with a sense of dread, mark the line between the sacred and the profane. . . . They are ecstatic, inspired declarations trumpeted from the mouth of the revealer, and they are brimming with infinite grace.

[28] Ibid., 133.

[29] This raises the question of disjunction vs. conjunction between the eschatological future and the this-worldly present. Will the ultimate future be so radically different that there will be no continuity? How we answer this will affect our ethics. John Howard Yoder, for example, takes the disjunctive route and severs the tie between eschatological salvation and social ethics. In his books, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972) and *The Priestly Kingdom* (Note Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), he argues for an ethics of discipleship to Jesus, and this means disciples must make the hard choice between obedience to the eschatological kingdom and effectiveness in the present world. Disciples do not seek to "manage" the affairs of the present world. I believe this commits the fallacy of false alternatives, because it is certainly possible for a disciple to be motivated by an eschatological sanction and in the very expression of it show love to this world and the creatures living in it. On the conjunctive side, John Cobb provides a salient example. For Cobb, eschatology is almost collapsed into the world process, so eschatological sanctions (if there are any) justify our actions at improving the moral quality of world history. Institutions and ideals can be changed for the better; and such change is salvific work, work that has an impact simultaneously on the world and on the consequent nature of God. The drawback here is that change can go both ways, both progress and regress. Process is guaranteed, progress is not. There is no hope for ultimate world transformation as the unilateral act of divine grace and power. See John B. Cobb, Jr. and David R. Griffin, *Process Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976) 117-118; see also Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Liberation of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 189.

> The Beatitudes usher the reader into a new world, and its inbreaking is marked by a royal distribution of gifts, by the announcement of amnesty, by surprising and surpassing generosity.[30]

Pertinent to our discussion here is the observation that the beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-12; Lk. 6:20-23) are both eschatological and existential, referring both to the future and to the present. The image of the Isle of the Blesséd, to which the just souls in this life go once they have passed beyond death into the next life, is evoked in each beatitudinal aphorism.[31]

> Blessed (Μακάριοι) are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (δικαιοσύνην), for they will be filled.

Note that the blessing is present tense with a future-tense sanction.

> Blessed (Μακάριοι) are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
> Blessed (Μακάριοι) are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

In two Matthean verses (Mt. 5:3, 10) the reward is present tense. In the remaining six verses of Matthew it is future. In the Lukan beatitudes we find both structures, yet they are accompanied by the strong statement that our reward is great in heaven (Lk. 6:23). It seems obvious that there is operative here a principle of reciprocity between future and present. Those who live beatitudinally are blessed now, yet there is more to come.[32]

[30] Robert H. Smith, *Matthew* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989) 79-80.

[31] The term "beatitude," from the Latin *beatitudo* which translates the Greek μακαριος, is reminiscent of the concluding section of the *Gorgias*, where Socrates tells an eschatological myth, a myth that Socrates claims he believes as truth. Its resemblance to Jesus' apocalyptic parable of the separation of the sheep from the goats is unmistakable. "The person who has lived all his or her life in justice and holiness shall go, when he is dead, to the Islands of the Blesséd (εις μακαρων νήμος) and dwell there in perfect happiness out of the reach of evil, but the one who has lived unjustly and impiously shall go to the house of vengeance and punishment, which is called Tartarus" (Plato *Gorgias* 523).

[32] The nature of the tie between future and present is enigmatic yet worth exploring. According to John Reumann, "We miss the point of these verses unless we see them as prophetic promises of salvation from God. Poor, hungry, sorrowful, hated—that describes man's situation now. Fulfillment, joy, reward, the kingdom—that describes what God offers. Each statement might be turned to read, heaven will reward you, God will bring joy and fullness, he will give you the kingdom (cf. Luke 12:32). The most surprising thing about these promises is that Jesus views them as resulting in a present blessedness" (*Jesus in the Church's Gospels* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968] 233). According to Richard Hiers, "Jesus sometimes pronounced judgment upon those whose *actions* (or inaction, lack of repentance and response) showed them indifferent to his message of the will and coming Kingdom of God. Similarly, Jesus also pronounced a favorable verdict upon those whose present *mode of being* was as it should be. The beatitudes illustrate both aspects. The poor, the meek, the merciful, and the like are already declared blessed, and are assured that they will enter the Kingdom of God, while—in Luke—those who are now rich, full, happy, and esteemed

What does Wilder say about the beatitudes? He makes two points relevant to our task here. First, Wilder speaks of the beatitudes as an ethic of grace rather than an ethic of obedience. He points out the positive tone of Jesus' teaching. This contrasts with the negative tone of John the Baptist for whom threat discourse dominated. In the beatitudes Jesus emphasizes that the coming reign of God is a gift, and the announcement of the reign of God is gospel, good news. The ethical sanction that fits here is "not one of rewards and punishments. The appeal is to gratitude, homage, imitation."[33] The prophecy of Jeremiah's new covenant, where the law of God is written on the human heart, seems to have achieved fulfillment here (Jer. 31:31-34). The beatitudes come in the form of declarations rather than exhortations; yet they still exhort us to do good and avoid evil as an expression of our heart's intimate tie to God and God's kingdom. We hunger and thirst after righteousness in order to glorify God, to sanctify his holy name. The blessings we envisage come as a free gift and precede our obedience; or at least the announcement of the blessings precedes the obedience. God's work of blessing us is fixed and sure. God's mercy is our motive. I would say that Wilder is here appealing to an intrinsic understanding of ethical sanction—that is, to live the life of beatitude indicates we have already internalized the gospel, we have recognized our intimate tie to God's kingdom. Who we are as a self is determined by this tie, and so our daily life is an expression of this internal oneness with God.

Second, Wilder recognizes that the beatitudes retain their future tense. They speak of both the present and the future. The strictly eschatological sanctions do not fade into unreality in the least.

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are condemned to experience a reversal of their fortunes in the coming dispensation" (*Jesus and the Future*, 40 [italics added]). In sum, beatitudinal living implies a dimension of blessedness in the present that is contingent upon a future reward.

[33] Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics*, 93. "The eschatological or other blessings are a matter of grace rather than being conditioned on obedience, or rather the obedience is itself part of the positive gift of the Kingdom" (Ibid., 112). Joachim Jeremias would agree on the grace dimension, applying it to the Sermon on the Mount as a whole. Although the sermon is filled with exhortations of the law apparently requiring Jesus' disciples to work for heavenly reward, Jeremias believes the sermon was in fact a catechism for living and therefore must have been preceded by the proclamation of good news, by the proclamation of forgiveness from God. The logic is this: because your sins have been forgiven and you have been granted sonship with God, what follows is a life of lived faith. "The result to which we have come is that the Sermon on the Mount is not law, but gospel. For this is indeed the difference between law and gospel: The law leaves man to rely upon his own strength and challenges him to do his utmost. The gospel, on the other hand, brings man before the gift of God and challenges him really to make the inexpressible gift of God the basis for his life. . . . one should speak of 'lived faith'" (Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount*, trans. Norman Perrin [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963] 34).

> The twofold considerations of blessing are retained: God's kingdom and his righteousness, beyond; and all these things added, here. In the world to come, life everlasting; and in the present world, one hundredfold return for all renunciation. Here, mercy, comfort and satisfaction; in the new age, the eschatological salvation and vision of God.[34]

It frankly puzzles me that Wilder can recognize the unmistakable reliance upon an eschatological future in Jesus' beatitudes, yet still relegate eschatology to a mythical fiction and a mere formal structure for an otherwise present-tense sanction based on the nature of God. It seems to me that what is happening here is this. Wilder has presumed that intrinsic sanctions are morally superior to extrinsic sanctions, and he has set out to find intrinsic sanctions in the teachings of Jesus. Because the dualist sanctions of heaven and hell appear extrinsic and inferior to appeals to common sense or especially to God's nature, they must be subordinated to the latter. This leads Wilder to posit that eschatological sanctions are formal and hence subordinated to what is more essential. Yet, what invisibly happens here, I think, is that the future tense inadvertently becomes subordinated to the present tense. Eschatology becomes unnecessarily stripped of its future. Is it possible to retain the eschatological future and still embrace intrinsic sanctions rising out of an experience with divine grace? The life of beatitude seems to do this.

VI. Beatitude as Prolepsis: Eschatological Intrinsic Sanctions

I believe that the concept of prolepsis offers a constructive way to conceive of beatitude in which eschatology retains its futurity yet manifests itself as an intrinsic ethical sanction. We ordinarily think of prolepsis with reference to Jesus Christ and the presence of God's kingdom in his person in advance of its arrival at the consummation. This applies especially to the future new creation appearing ahead of time in the Easter resurrection of Jesus, "the first fruits of those who have died" (1 Cor. 15:20).[35] What happened to Jesus on Easter is a prolepsis of the general resurrection yet to come, of the consummate fulfillment of God's promised new creation that still awaits us in the as-yet-unactualized future.

The as-yet-unactualized future is not simply waiting out there in time for world history to catch up. The new aeon is not waiting for the old aeon to

[34] Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics*, 112.

[35] "Christ's resurrection can be understood only in an apocalyptic sense, that is, as a proleptic anticipation of the general resurrection in the coming age" (Beker, *The Triumph of God*, 68).

end. Rather, the new is invading the old. The new is appearing ahead of time in, with, and under the old. This appearance ahead of time is prolepsis. It applies to the person of Jesus Christ, but by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us it applies to us as well. J. Christiaan Beker puts it this way: "The death and resurrection of Christ mark the incursion of the future age into the old age. . . . Furthermore, the proleptic experience of the new age is manifest in the new life in the Spirit made possible for Christians through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."[36] Beker is interpreting Paul here.[37] Can we take this understanding of life in the Spirit and use it to explicate beatitude?

Perhaps we can if there is some truth to what Krister Stendahl says about "messianic license." With the term "messianic license" Stendahl argues that "the Sermon on the Mount is actually a rebellious manifesto which gives to disciples of Christ the right to break the Law in the name of Christ."[38] Messianic license begins with the fulfillment of the law—the eschatological fulfillment of the law in the new covenant when it will be written on our hearts as described by Jeremiah 31:31-34—fulfilled ahead of time by being written on the heart of Jesus the Messiah. My concern here is not with the

[36] Ibid., 28-29.

[37] Karl Barth could be speaking about the life of beatitude when commenting on Paul's Romans. On the one hand, the ethical demand is more than we can accomplish given who we are and the nature of the world in which we live. On the other hand, the ethical demand bespeaks a transformation promised in the future yet somehow effective today. "*We do not fashion ourselves according to the present form of this world, but according to its transformation.* . . . We must not delude ourselves. . . . There is no human action which is in itself fashioned according to the transformation of this world; but there are actions which seem so transparent that the light of the coming Day is almost visible to them" (Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* [London: Oxford University Press, 1933; repr., 1968] 434-435).

Now, Barth may appear at first to land with both feet squarely in the present when he says of the Sermon on the Mount, "its overwhelming and decisive emphasis is not on the future but on the present." We are called now to be citizens of God's kingdom, and that kingdom has already drawn near in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet Barth keeps one foot in the future. The connection between present and future must be maintained. So Barth continues, saying that we look to Jesus as the only and real future. "And this future is not a mere future without present actuality, or a mere promise without present fulfillment. His word is the truth—not to-morrow only but already to-day—for His kingdom" (*Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1962] II/2.689-690. It seems to me that the idea of prolepsis is the best direction to carry Barth's interpretation.

[38] Stendahl goes on to say, "But it is important to remember that it *is* subversive, and that the disciple must be prepared to pay the price for such action. So it was then and so it may be now. The license cannot be easily translated into a higher ethic. It can only be appropriated in faith, and will always threaten the equilibrium of God's created world, which after all is God's world under Law, sometimes even under God's Law" ("Messianic License," in *Biblical Realism Confronts the Nation*, ed. Paul Peachey [New York: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1963] 149; reprinted in Krister Stendahl, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and Guide* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984] 85-97).

question of the law in the Sermon on the Mount but with the question of eschatology. Stendahl says, "It all hinges on whether the New Age, the Age to Come has arrived for a full or partial manifestation here and now."[39] The question has to do with the relation of the future kingdom to the present age. Stendahl adds, "The Kingdom manifests itself in the Holy Spirit, which is the down payment and the first fruits of our inheritance."[40]

If Wilder is right in saying that the beatitudes are an ethic of grace, then I wonder if what Beker and Stendahl say here could connect the eschatological promise and the Holy Spirit to the life of beatitude. Divine grace is present yet not possessed. We do not control it. Grace is the power of transformation within our untransformed or pretransformed state, a power borne by the presence of God and operative within us yet still not something we own or manipulate or capitalize on for our own personal aggrandizement. God's grace is co-present, so to speak. God's glorious future is co-present to the mundane present. God retains the patent on righteousness, and our lives bespeak a righteousness that goes beyond our own motives or even awareness. Our moral action must employ methods and techniques of ordinary life within this still-darkened aeon, yet the divine grace within allows them to serve as windows emitting light from a brighter day to come.

That light is shed backwards in time from the future New Jerusalem which needs no lamp or sun because the Lord God will be its light (Rev. 22:5). Proleptic living begins with the eschatological vision of the transformed creation symbolized by the kingdom of God or, in the biblical Apocalypse, the holy city.

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
>
> "See, the home of God is among mortals.
> He will dwell with them as their God;
> they will be his peoples,
> and God himself will be with them;
> he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

[39] Ibid., 145-146.
[40] Ibid., 149-150.

Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away."
(Rev. 21:1-4)

The tension as well as the continuity between the future and the present is expressed in the yearning: if in God's new creation there will be no more mourning or crying or pain, then why mourning and crying and pain now? To live today out of a vision of God's tomorrow is to live wiping tears from sorrowful eyes, to live out of an ethic that seeks to remove the reasons for mourning and crying and pain. Proleptic ethics seeks to realize tomorrow's reality today.

Is there transformatory power in proleptic ethics? Yes. Key here is that we begin with an eschatological vision of God's new creation and then seek transformation of the present world in light of it. Rather than a sedative, the promise of heaven is a stimulus to earthly action. This makes ethics creative. Unsatisfied with the way things are, those living the life of beatitude hunger and thirst after greater justice; and this requires creative measures. Those living the life of beatitude are imbued with God's love, and this love spills out as love toward the world.[41] In the words of Wolfhart Pannenberg, "the striving for God as the ultimate good beyond the world is turned into concern for the world."[42] Love makes us concerned for the world, and this love employs "creative imagination." When interpreting Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and the question, "who is my neighbor?" Pannenberg comments that we should not simply wait around for neighbors to identify themselves. Rather, we should go out to create new neighbors.[43] Love is creative and aggressive and in this sense exhibits the power of transformation. In beatitudinal living, the power of transformation emerges from our love for neighbor and love for the world, not from the inner desire

[41] "Appreciation of the last things cannot be won by hurriedly passing over the things that come before" (Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* [New York: Harper & Bros., Harper Torchbooks, 1957] 228).

[42] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969) 111. J. Christiaan Beker argues similarly on the basis of the Pauline corpus that the eschatological or apocalyptic hope leads to a sense of "solidarity" with the new creation amidst the present creation. "The universal scope of God's coming reign necessitates a radical conception of the church *for* the world. Christians are only then 'in Christ' when they become partners in God's cosmic redemptive plan for his world" (Beker, *The Triumph of God*, xiv; see also Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1982] 111).

[43] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981) 65. See my analysis in Ted Peters, "Pannenberg's Eschatological Ethics," in *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988) 239-265.

to seek our own transformation in order to ready us for reward. If the beatitudes are an ethic of grace, and if the transformatory power that will bring the new creation both eschatologically and proleptically belongs to God, then our love is in effect an expression of God's love in, with, and under our own lives.

VII. Unanswered Questions

In this work I have left a number of questions unanswered, questions that simply take us beyond the scope of this article. First, is it proper to assume that intrinsic sanctions are morally superior to extrinsic sanctions of reward and punishment? Wilder seems to assume this. I have not here challenged this assumption. Yet we must acknowledge that the New Testament appeals to a wide variety of ethical sanctions, including crass appeals to promise of reward and threat of damnation. Even the beatitudes in Luke are followed by a set of woes, of threats (Lk. 6:24-26). Thus, it seems that a critical review of the Wilder assumption is called for, a review that pits the authority of the New Testament revelation over against the wisdom of moral discernment.

A second unanswered question is the relative weight within eschatology of the dualistic structure of heaven and hell over against the more universalist or inclusivist trajectory of grace. The proleptic approach I am developing here is based on the christology and eschatology developed by theologians such as Carl Braaten and Wolfhart Pannenberg, and this approach tends toward wholism and universalism. Can we reconcile the structure of double destiny inherent in apocalyptic eschatology with the beatitudinal vision of heaven on earth, of the future glory within the present mess?

The question I have sought to answer is this: can we think of our eschatological vision of God's glory as an ethical sanction? Within the limited scope of rereading Amos Wilder's parsing of Jesus' teachings in Matthew, we can see that there are many ways to sanction ethical behavior; and among them eschatological sanctions carry a great deal of weight. Eschatological sanctions appear at first to be strictly extrinsic in character; and, if one believes that intrinsic sanctions are somehow superior, the temptation will arise to defuturize the eschatology. I suggest that we resist this temptation. Such defuturization is misleading and unnecessary. It is misleading because the texts with which Wilder himself deals—and perhaps the New Testament generally—presume that eschatology refers us to a future that will be actualized. It would be misleading to say otherwise. Defuturization is also unnecessary, because it is possible to understand Christian ethics

proleptically as both future and present, as both extrinsic and intrinsic. This is what we find in the beatitudes. To hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God's future kingdom is, by God's grace, to realize blessédness in the present.

Appendix

In this figure we can see that grace in the form of the eschatological new creation comes to us from God as a gift, and this is requisite for the life of beatitude, a life lived proleptically and expressing itself in works of love that include love for our enemies.[44]

	Works	Grace
Extrinsic Sanctions	*heaven as reward* *hell as punishment*	*new creation* *forgiveness, resurrection*
Intrinsic Sanctions	*common sense* *Be perfect as God is!*	*beatitude* *prolepsis*

[44] I am grateful to my research assistant, Patricia Codron, for her critical review and constructive suggestions on the structure of my argument here.


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